

PARLIAMENT OF VICTORIA

**PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

FIFTY-NINTH PARLIAMENT

FIRST SESSION

WEDNESDAY, 6 APRIL 2022

hansard.parliament.vic.gov.au

By authority of the Victorian Government Printer

The Governor

The Honourable LINDA DESSAU AC

The Lieutenant-Governor

The Honourable JAMES ANGUS AO

The ministry

Premier.	The Hon. DM Andrews MP
Deputy Premier, Minister for Transport Infrastructure, Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop and Minister for Commonwealth Games Delivery	The Hon. JM Allan MP
Attorney-General and Minister for Emergency Services	The Hon. J Symes MLC
Minister for Training and Skills, Minister for Higher Education and Minister for Agriculture	The Hon. GA Tierney MLC
Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development, Minister for Industrial Relations and Minister for Trade	The Hon. TH Pallas MP
Minister for Planning.	The Hon. EA Blandthorn MP
Minister for Child Protection and Family Services and Minister for Disability, Ageing and Carers	The Hon. CW Brooks MP
Minister for Police, Minister for Crime Prevention and Minister for Racing.	The Hon. AR Carbines MP
Minister for Public Transport, Minister for Roads and Road Safety, Minister for Industry Support and Recovery and Minister for Business Precincts	The Hon. BA Carroll MP
Minister for Energy, Minister for Environment and Climate Action and Minister for Solar Homes	The Hon. L D'Ambrosio MP
Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events and Minister for Creative Industries	The Hon. S Dimopoulos MP
Minister for Ports and Freight, Minister for Consumer Affairs, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Local Government and Minister for Suburban Development	The Hon. MM Horne MP
Minister for Education and Minister for Women.	The Hon. NM Hutchins MP
Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice, Minister for Victim Support and Minister for Fishing and Boating	The Hon. S Kilkenny MP
Minister for Commonwealth Games Legacy and Minister for Veterans .	The Hon. SL Leane MLC
Assistant Treasurer, Minister for Regulatory Reform, Minister for Government Services and Minister for Housing	The Hon. DJ Pearson MP
Minister for Employment, Minister for Innovation, Medical Research and the Digital Economy, Minister for Small Business and Minister for Resources	The Hon. JL Pulford MLC
Minister for Water, Minister for Regional Development and Minister for Equality	The Hon. H Shing MLC
Minister for Multicultural Affairs, Minister for Prevention of Family Violence, Minister for Community Sport and Minister for Youth. . . .	The Hon. RL Spence MP
Minister for Workplace Safety and Minister for Early Childhood and Pre-Prep	The Hon. I Stitt MLC
Minister for Health and Minister for Ambulance Services.	The Hon. M Thomas MP
Minister for Mental Health and Minister for Treaty and First Peoples. . .	The Hon. G Williams MP
Cabinet Secretary	Mr SJ McGhie MP

Legislative Council committees

Economy and Infrastructure Standing Committee

Mr Finn, Mr Gepp, Dr Kieu, Mrs McArthur, Mr Quilty and Mr Tarlamis.

Participating members: Dr Bach, Ms Bath, Dr Cumming, Mr Davis, Ms Lovell, Mr Meddick, Mr Ondarchie, Mr Rich-Phillips, Ms Vaghela and Ms Watt.

Environment and Planning Standing Committee

Dr Bach, Ms Bath, Dr Cumming, Mr Grimley, Mr Hayes, Mr Meddick, Mr Melhem, Dr Ratnam, Ms Terpstra and Ms Watt.

Participating members: Ms Burnett-Wake, Ms Crozier, Mr Davis, Dr Kieu, Mrs McArthur, Mr Quilty and Mr Rich-Phillips.

Legal and Social Issues Standing Committee

Ms Burnett-Wake, Mr Erdogan, Dr Kieu, Ms Maxwell, Mr Ondarchie, Ms Patten and Ms Taylor.

Participating members: Dr Bach, Ms Bath, Ms Crozier, Dr Cumming, Mr Gepp, Mr Grimley, Ms Lovell, Mr Quilty, Dr Ratnam, Mr Tarlamis, Ms Terpstra, Ms Vaghela and Ms Watt.

Privileges Committee

Mr Atkinson, Mr Bourman, Mr Davis, Mr Grimley, Mr Leane, Mr Rich-Phillips, Ms Shing, Ms Symes and Ms Tierney.

Procedure Committee

The President, the Deputy President, Ms Crozier, Mr Davis, Mr Grimley, Dr Kieu, Ms Patten, Ms Pulford and Ms Symes.

Joint committees

Dispute Resolution Committee

Council: Mr Bourman, Ms Crozier, Mr Davis, Ms Symes and Ms Tierney.

Assembly: Ms Allan, Ms Hennessy, Mr Merlino, Mr Pakula and Mr R Smith.

Electoral Matters Committee

Council: Mr Erdogan, Mrs McArthur, Mr Meddick, Mr Melhem, Ms Lovell, Mr Quilty and Mr Tarlamis.

Assembly: Ms Hall, Dr Read and Mr Rowswell.

House Committee

Council: The President (*ex officio*), Mr Bourman, Mr Davis, Mr Leane, Ms Lovell and Ms Stitt.

Assembly: The Speaker (*ex officio*), Mr T Bull, Ms Crugnale, Mr Fregon, Ms Sandell, Ms Staley and Ms Suleyman.

Integrity and Oversight Committee

Council: Mr Grimley.

Assembly: Mr Halse, Mr Maas, Mr Rowswell, Mr Taylor, Ms Ward and Mr Wells.

Pandemic Declaration Accountability and Oversight Committee

Council: Ms Crozier and Mr Erdogan.

Assembly: Mr J Bull, Mr Eren, Ms Kealy, Mr Sheed, Ms Ward and Mr Wells.

Public Accounts and Estimates Committee

Council: Mrs McArthur and Ms Taylor.

Assembly: Ms Connolly, Mr Hibbins, Mr Maas, Mr Newbury, Mr D O'Brien, Ms Richards and Mr Richardson.

Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee

Council: Mr Gepp, Ms Patten, Ms Terpstra and Ms Watt.

Assembly: Mr Burgess, Ms Connolly and Mr Morris.

Heads of parliamentary departments

Assembly: Clerk of the Legislative Assembly: Ms B Noonan

Council: Clerk of the Parliaments and Clerk of the Legislative Council: Mr A Young

Parliamentary Services: Secretary: Ms T Burrows

MEMBERS OF THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL
FIFTY-NINTH PARLIAMENT—FIRST SESSION

President

The Hon. N ELASMAR (from 18 June 2020)

The Hon. SL LEANE (to 18 June 2020)

Deputy President

The Hon. WA LOVELL

Acting Presidents

Mr Bourman, Mr Gepp, Mr Melhem and Ms Patten

Leader of the Government

The Hon. J SYMES

Deputy Leader of the Government

The Hon. GA TIERNEY

Leader of the Opposition

The Hon. DM DAVIS

Deputy Leader of the Opposition

Ms G CROZIER

Member	Region	Party	Member	Region	Party
Atkinson, Mr Bruce Norman	Eastern Metropolitan	LP	McIntosh, Mr Thomas Andrew ⁹	Eastern Victoria	ALP
Bach, Dr Matthew ¹	Eastern Metropolitan	LP	Maxwell, Ms Tania Maree	Northern Victoria	DHJP
Barton, Mr Rodney Brian	Eastern Metropolitan	TMP	Meddick, Mr Andy	Western Victoria	AJP
Bath, Ms Melina Gaye	Eastern Victoria	Nats	Melhem, Mr Cesar	Western Metropolitan	ALP
Bourman, Mr Jeffrey	Eastern Victoria	SFFP	Mikakos, Ms Jenny ¹⁰	Northern Metropolitan	ALP
Burnett-Wake, Ms Cathrine ²	Eastern Victoria	LP	O'Donohue, Mr Edward John ¹¹	Eastern Victoria	LP
Crozier, Ms Georgina Mary	Southern Metropolitan	LP	Ondarchie, Mr Craig Philip	Northern Metropolitan	LP
Cumming, Dr Catherine Rebecca	Western Metropolitan	Ind	Patten, Ms Fiona Heather	Northern Metropolitan	FPRP
Dalidakis, Mr Philip ³	Southern Metropolitan	ALP	Pulford, Ms Jaala Lee	Western Victoria	ALP
Davis, Mr David McLean	Southern Metropolitan	LP	Quilty, Mr Timothy	Northern Victoria	LDP
Elasmar, Mr Nazih	Northern Metropolitan	ALP	Ratnam, Dr Samantha Shantini	Northern Metropolitan	Greens
Erdogan, Mr Enver ⁴	Southern Metropolitan	ALP	Rich-Phillips, Mr Gordon Kenneth	South Eastern Metropolitan	LP
Finn, Mr Bernard Thomas Christopher ⁵	Western Metropolitan	DLP	Shing, Ms Harriet	Eastern Victoria	ALP
Garrett, Ms Jane Furneaux ⁶	Eastern Victoria	ALP	Somyurek, Mr Adem ¹²	South Eastern Metropolitan	Ind
Gepp, Mr Mark	Northern Victoria	ALP	Stitt, Ms Ingrid	Western Metropolitan	ALP
Grimley, Mr Stuart James	Western Victoria	DHJP	Symes, Ms Jaclyn	Northern Victoria	ALP
Hayes, Mr Clifford	Southern Metropolitan	SAP	Tarlamis, Mr Lee ¹³	South Eastern Metropolitan	ALP
Jennings, Mr Gavin Wayne ⁷	South Eastern Metropolitan	ALP	Taylor, Ms Nina	Southern Metropolitan	ALP
Kieu, Dr Tien Dung	South Eastern Metropolitan	ALP	Terpstra, Ms Sonja	Eastern Metropolitan	ALP
Leane, Mr Shaun Leo	Eastern Metropolitan	ALP	Tierney, Ms Gayle Anne	Western Victoria	ALP
Limbrick, Mr David ⁸	South Eastern Metropolitan	LDP	Vaghela, Ms Kaushaliya Virjibhai ¹⁴	Western Metropolitan	Ind
Lovell, Ms Wendy Ann	Northern Victoria	LP	Watt, Ms Sheena ¹⁵	Northern Metropolitan	ALP
McArthur, Mrs Beverley	Western Victoria	LP	Wooldridge, Ms Mary Louise Newling ¹⁶	Eastern Metropolitan	LP

¹ Appointed 5 March 2020

² Appointed 2 December 2021

³ Resigned 17 June 2019

⁴ Appointed 15 August 2019

⁵ LP until 24 May 2022

Ind 24 May–2 June 2022

⁶ Died 2 July 2022

⁷ Resigned 23 March 2020

⁸ Resigned 11 April 2022

Appointed 23 June 2022

⁹ Appointed 18 August 2022

¹⁰ Resigned 26 September 2020

¹¹ Resigned 1 December 2021

¹² ALP until 15 June 2020

¹³ Appointed 23 April 2020

¹⁴ ALP until 7 March 2022

¹⁵ Appointed 13 October 2020

¹⁶ Resigned 28 February 2020

Party abbreviations

AJP—Animal Justice Party; ALP—Labor Party; DHJP—Derryn Hinch's Justice Party;

DLP—Democratic Labour Party; FPRP—Fiona Patten's Reason Party; Greens—Australian Greens;

Ind—Independent; LDP—Liberal Democratic Party; LP—Liberal Party; Nats—The Nationals;

SAP—Sustainable Australia Party; SFFP—Shooters, Fishers and Farmers Party; TMP—Transport Matters Party

CONTENTS

ANNOUNCEMENTS	
Acknowledgement of country	1173
PETITIONS	
Timber industry	1173
PAPERS	
Papers	1173
PRODUCTION OF DOCUMENTS	
Timber industry	1174
Emergency Services Telecommunications Authority	1174
BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE	
Notices	1174
COMMITTEES	
Environment and Planning Committee	1174
Reporting dates	1174
MEMBERS STATEMENTS	
Carole Manifold	1174
Afghan community hub, Dandenong	1175
Nepalese Association of Victoria and Cambodian Association of Victoria anniversary events	1175
Blue the Grey	1175
Blue the Grey	1176
Northern Victoria cultural events	1176
Member conduct	1176
Member conduct	1176
Beaumaris Secondary College	1177
Bob Keeper Easter appeal	1177
Alf Goldberg OAM	1177
Parkville youth prevention and recovery care centre	1178
Learn Local Awards	1178
Back to Back Theatre	1179
Sophie Molan	1179
PRODUCTION OF DOCUMENTS	
Emergency Services Telecommunications Authority	1180
MOTIONS	
Russia-Ukraine war	1193
BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE	
Notices of motion	1196
MOTIONS	
Sexual offence reporting	1196
QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE AND MINISTERS STATEMENTS	
Government advertising	1201
Duck hunting	1202
Ministers statements: university funding	1202
Victoria Police licensing and regulation division	1203
Country Fire Authority funding	1203
Ministers statements: elders cultural wellbeing project	1204
Local government funding	1205
Suburban Rail Loop	1206
Ministers statements: Connecting Victoria	1206
Elective surgery	1207
Probuild	1207
Written responses	1209
CONSTITUENCY QUESTIONS	
Western Metropolitan Region	1209
Northern Victoria Region	1209
Western Victoria Region	1209
Northern Metropolitan Region	1210
Western Metropolitan Region	1210
Eastern Victoria Region	1210
Northern Victoria Region	1210
Northern Victoria Region	1211
MOTIONS	

Sexual offence reporting	1211
BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE	
Notices of motion	1223
MOTIONS	
Political donations	1223
BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE	
Notices of motion and orders of the day	1241
STATEMENTS ON REPORTS, PAPERS AND PETITIONS	
Medicinal cannabis	1241
Petition	1241
Department of Treasury and Finance	1242
Budget papers 2021–22	1242
Department of Treasury and Finance	1243
Budget papers 2021–22	1243
Electoral Matters Committee	1244
Inquiry into Whether Victoria Should Participate in a National Electoral Roll Platform	1244
Economy and Infrastructure Committee	1245
Inquiry into the Multi Purpose Taxi Program	1245
Economy and Infrastructure Committee	1246
Inquiry into the Multi Purpose Taxi Program	1246
Timber industry	1247
Petition	1247
ADJOURNMENT	
Middle Road, Truganina	1248
Murray Basin rail project	1249
Alcohol and other drug services	1250
School sports facilities	1250
Waste and recycling management	1251
Wombat State Forest	1251
Bamstone	1252
Worker Screening Act 2020	1253
Bamstone	1253
Dalton and Epping roads, Epping	1253
Western Metropolitan Region maternity services	1254
Latrobe Valley air monitoring	1254
Responses	1255
JOINT SITTING OF PARLIAMENT	
Senate vacancy	1256
Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation	1256

Wednesday, 6 April 2022

The PRESIDENT (Hon. N Elasmr) took the chair at 9.34 am and read the prayer.

Announcements

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

The PRESIDENT (09:35): On behalf of the Victorian state Parliament I acknowledge the Aboriginal peoples, the traditional custodians of this land which has served as a significant meeting place of the First People of Victoria. I acknowledge and pay respect to the elders of the Aboriginal nations in Victoria past, present and emerging and welcome any elders and members of the Aboriginal communities who may visit or participate in the events or proceedings of the Parliament.

Petitions

Following petition presented to house:

TIMBER INDUSTRY

The Petition of certain citizens of the State of Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Council the need to retain ecologically sustainable timber harvesting for high-value products as consumers value local and ecologically sustainable native timbers.

Contemporary ecologically sustainable timber harvesting is being blamed for detrimental ecological legacies of wildfire, past land clearing, invasive species and historical harvesting. However, contemporary timber harvesting is a valuable tool that creates mosaic disturbances—increasing species richness, biodiversity and ecosystem resilience.

The Victorian Forestry Plan (VFP) will cease low-impact, selective, ecologically sustainable, value adding timber harvesting for furniture and musical instruments, taking an extreme approach to the future of our forests.

The Government has neglected its election promises to support ecologically sustainable forest management, adopting specific Victorian Greens' policies to develop the VFP.

The VFP does not align with consistent independent expert advice from the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council, scientific understandings or community preferences. It also overlooks the diversity of harvesting methods that do not have issues of supply and do not conflict with wildlife protection.

Victorians will lose a fundamental cultural connection in accessing timber from the bush, a connection as old as humanity.

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Council call on the Government to amend the Victorian Forestry Plan to provide for ecologically sustainable production of hardwood timber in state forests, with a focus on high value products and attain the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certification for all VicForests timber harvesting operations across Victoria.

By Mrs McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (893 signatures).

Laid on table.

Papers

PAPERS

Tabled by Clerk:

Auditor-General's Reports on—

ICT Provisioning in Schools, April 2022 (*Ordered to be published*).

Government Advertising, April 2022 (*Ordered to be published*).

Victorian Law Reform Commission—

Improving the Justice System Response to Sexual Offences: Supplementary Report on 'Grab and Drag' Conduct, December 2021 (*Ordered to be published*).

Stalking—Interim Report, December 2021 (*Ordered to be published*).

Proclamations of the Governor in Council fixing operative dates in respect of the following acts:

Justice Legislation Amendment (Criminal Procedure Disclosure and Other Matters) Act 2022—
Part 3—29 March 2022 (*Gazette No. S157, 29 March 2022*).

Major Events Legislation Amendment (Unauthorised Ticket Packages and Other Matters) Act 2022—
Whole Act—31 March 2022 (*Gazette No. S157, 29 March 2022*).

Production of documents

TIMBER INDUSTRY

The Clerk: I lay on the table a letter from the Attorney-General dated 5 April 2022 in response to the resolution of the Council of 23 March 2022 on the motion of Mr Bourman, and further to the government's responses of 9 March 2022 and 1 December 2021, relating to the closure of the Victorian native timber industry. The letter states that there was insufficient time to respond and that a final response to the order would be provided as soon as possible.

EMERGENCY SERVICES TELECOMMUNICATIONS AUTHORITY

The Clerk: I also lay on the table a further letter from the Attorney-General dated 5 April 2022 in response to the resolution of the Council of 23 March 2022 on the motion of Mr Davis relating to the Emergency Services Telecommunications Authority. The letter states that there was insufficient time to respond and that a final response to the order would be provided as soon as possible.

Business of the house

NOTICES

Notices of motion given.

Notices of intention to make a statement given.

Committees

ENVIRONMENT AND PLANNING COMMITTEE

Reporting dates

Mr HAYES (Southern Metropolitan) (09:44): I move, by leave:

That the resolution of the Council of 4 March 2020 and the resolution of the committee reported to the house on 2 June 2020 requiring the Environment and Planning Committee to inquire into, consider and report by 30 April 2022 on Victoria's transition to renewable energy be amended so as to now require the committee to present its report by 31 May 2022.

Mr DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan—Leader of the Opposition) (09:45): This is a very important committee, and it is an important inquiry. We do not in any way dispute the extension of this inquiry, but I can put on record that we are troubled that an important planning reference will not proceed. I do not think it is any great secret that there was an attempt by the opposition to extend the terms of reference to ensure that heritage and key vegetation requirements in our suburbs were actually properly considered by that inquiry, but I understand that the workload of the committee is such that that will not occur. I put on record our view that that inquiry and the planning matters, the vegetation matters and the heritage matters that relate to that inquiry are very, very important for metropolitan Melbourne. We are at significant risk, and this should be an urgent priority in our new Parliament.

Motion agreed to.

Members statements

CAROLE MANIFOLD

Mrs McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (09:46): I rise to pay tribute to the incredible Carole Manifold, who retired last month after 60 years—yes, 60 years—working for South West Healthcare

at Camperdown Hospital and Merindah Lodge. Over the decades her contribution to care, especially aged care, in the Camperdown area has been inspirational. She has dedicated not just her working life to it but her free time too. Carole has been president of the Friends and Relatives of Merindah Lodge committee for 11 years and has raised tens of thousands of dollars for cancer charities through making Christmas cakes and other endeavours, all while fighting cancer herself. I can personally attest to the excellence of her water aerobics tuition, and I know many will be glad to hear she intends to continue running her own exercise classes as well as enjoying caring for her own family, with 13 grandchildren and two great-grandchildren.

Carole is an inspiration to all in the south-west area of western Victoria. I am very proud to know her. I am very proud to have been involved with her in various endeavours. I once took the whippets to the hospital at Merindah Lodge to see if they could engage with the residents, and Carole supervised that. So we thank Carole for her inspirational service, and may she continue her wonderful endeavours.

AFGHAN COMMUNITY HUB, DANDENONG

Dr KIEU (South Eastern Metropolitan) (09:47): Last Thursday I had the pleasure of attending the inaugural ceremony of the newly established Afghan community hub in Dandenong with my parliamentary colleague Pauline Richards MP and a number of distinguished community leaders as part of the newly arrived Afghans' resettlement and integration support program and the Victorian Afghan Associations Network. As a former refugee and in light of the tragedies unfolding in Afghanistan, it was truly heartening to see such a vital organisation established in the south-east. Refugees who come to this new country bring with them their absolute commitment to rebuild their lives, support their families and meaningfully contribute to the nation that accepted them.

NEPALESE ASSOCIATION OF VICTORIA AND CAMBODIAN ASSOCIATION OF VICTORIA ANNIVERSARY EVENTS

Dr KIEU: On another matter, later in the week I also had the pleasure of attending the Nepalese Association of Victoria's 25th anniversary silver jubilee celebration and the Cambodian Association of Victoria's 35 years of serving the Cambodian community event. I was delighted to celebrate the tireless and longstanding work of these community organisations in promoting multiculturalism, solidarity, inclusiveness and a strong sense of belonging within the multicultural and broader communities. As we move towards a brighter, safer and more prosperous future, the generosity, support and contributions of our diverse and vibrant Victorian community are now more important than ever.

BLUE THE GREY

Mr MEDDICK (Western Victoria) (09:49): It is said that dogs are not our whole lives but they make our lives whole, yet I think when it came to Blue the Grey he arguably was his human Kim's whole life. Blue was breaking records on the racetrack until he broke his leg. Blue was one of the lucky ones who survived racing. He became a social media sensation, with a loyal online following known as 'Blue's crew'. His lovable antics, awkward behaviour and famous toast face were seen in every corner of the globe. Through this he helped change the narrative and in so doing the lives of countless other greyhounds.

His couch roaching, love for beige foods and high-pitched whining for attention were not unique to him but are indicative that every single greyhound is an individual that simply wants to be safe from harm and to love and be loved. But most are not so lucky, and Blue shone a light on the horrors of the industry he was born into, where dogs are nothing more than commodities to create gambling profits. Greyhounds belong on the couch, not on a racetrack, and Blue showed us all that.

Last week Blue suddenly passed away. In his honour I renew my calls for this government to ban greyhound racing. My deepest condolences to Kim, Anna and Leo, who all now have a big, lanky Blue-shaped hole in their hearts and home. May Blue's legacy live on and continue to create a kinder world for greys. Vale, Blue the Grey, you toast-loving legend.

BLUE THE GREY

Ms SHING (Eastern Victoria) (09:51): Mr Meddick has set the tone here today, because I intend to speak about a remarkable dog at this, the beginning of Greyhound Adoption Month. Blue the Grey was an exceptional bag of elbows. He whistled, he roached, he frolicked, he stole and he consumed toast wherever he possibly could, and his family, Kim, Anna and Leo, loved him unconditionally. One of the things that Blue was particularly good at was bringing people along with him on his clumsy, galumphing journey through the world. Blue had around 47 000 devoted members of 'Blue's crew' online, and now we are grieving. We are grieving because Blue, having been discovered to have a heart tumour last week, died very suddenly. He was an exemplary dog. He was a very good boy, and because of the grief associated with his sudden passing, there has been more than \$100 000 raised in his name since he passed to support greyhounds everywhere. Greyhounds make amazing pets. Blue was and is an extraordinary example of just how much love a greyhound can bring. So I send my love to his human family, and I would encourage everyone to let a little Blue into their lives. Vale, darling boy.

NORTHERN VICTORIA CULTURAL EVENTS

Ms MAXWELL (Northern Victoria) (09:52): You cannot travel the Mallee without marvelling at the three things these big-hearted north-west communities do so well—turning vast salt lakes into visitor destinations where you wonder at the awesome arc of earth and sky day or night, transforming concrete grain silos into breathtaking portraits of rural life and making award-winning vanilla slice at Sharp's Bakery, Birchip.

Recently at the first Mali Heart Street Art Festival the people of Birchip and Watchem created another destination experience. Across the Labour Day weekend I joined these communities, artists and school students to celebrate a collaboration that has produced seven works of art on hotel, garage, local store and portable grain silo walls—wonderful additions to northern Victoria's art trail. Congratulations to the Birchip Community Forum's Jak Goldsmith, John Richmond and Ed Rickard; Blender Studios; Buloke shire's Kerrie Mulholland; festival artists led by Adrian Doyle; and the many people and organisations who made Mali Heart happen.

I also enjoyed Sea Lake's Royal Hotel's fine hospitality, got my rev fix at Wycheproof Lions show and shine and heard about the upcoming Wide Open Spaces weekend in Beulah, home of the film *The Dry*. These small communities are not waiting. Using collaboration and creativity, they are stepping up and out into the future.

MEMBER CONDUCT

Mr GEPP (Northern Victoria) (09:54): Constituents have contacted my office about the lack of leadership from Matthew Guy following the revelations of the behaviour of Mr David Davis at recent work functions. It has been reported and verified that Mr Davis on at least two occasions has been drunk and abusive towards others at these functions. My constituents are appalled at this behaviour and cannot understand how Mr Davis gets off scot-free where any other worker would have been punted. Indeed if any of the workers at these functions had acted towards Mr Davis the way he did to them, they would not have seen the end of their shift; in fact the Liberals would have insisted upon it. Matthew Guy either is not bothered by this boorish behaviour of Mr Davis or does not have the internal power to deal with it. Either way Mr Davis is not fit. For somebody who has been in this place for the length of time that he has, he is not fit to continue to operate in this place, certainly not as a Leader of the Opposition. And Mr Guy should show leadership in this area and deal with it immediately.

MEMBER CONDUCT

Dr CUMMING (Western Metropolitan) (09:55): The Parliament website states that the Legislative Council acts as a 'house of review' by 'scrutinising, debating and ... amending or rejecting legislation'. It is our role as members of the crossbench to ask those questions, often brought to us by our constituents. However, discussion is shut down. The opposition and the crossbench members are

threatened, bullied, accused and called names both inside and outside this house. Their views are misrepresented by the government. What is even more appalling is that some members are two-faced and call out other members for their behaviour outside the house, and then they are often guilty of the exact same behaviour in this house.

I would like to remind all of us of our responsibilities under the Members of Parliament (Standards) Act 1978:

A Member must be fair, objective and courteous—

- (a) in their dealings with the community; and
- (b) without detracting from the importance of robust public debate in a democracy, in their dealings with other Members.

So does their behaviour meet these standards? I think so, or I do not think so. Can we please respect one another's views and treat one another with respect?

BEAUMARIS SECONDARY COLLEGE

Mr ERDOGAN (Southern Metropolitan) (09:57): Last Friday I had the honour of attending the official opening of stage 2 of Beaumaris Secondary College. I was joined by my colleague in this place Ms Nina Taylor along with the Parliamentary Secretary for Schools, Mr Richardson, and the member for Sandringham. It was a fantastic event, and it was great to hear about the school's journey from community campaign through to the election of our government and us delivering a brand-new school in the region. It was fantastic to hear all the community activists talk about their contributions and how they felt they were up against it but how a strong community campaign with involvement from local councillors, community activists and local sporting clubs, all participating together and working with the local MPs, delivered a fantastic school.

The school is immensely popular, and with our upgrades to the STEM and food learning spaces at the building the capacity has increased to 1100. Next year they will have their first year 12 cohort, so they are up to year 11 at the moment. It is an extremely successful school. I felt it was important to share that, because obviously I am very proud of our government's contribution to state education. We have opened over 100 schools, and Beaumaris Secondary College is one of the best I have seen. I want to thank the school principal, Debby Chaves, and the school council president, Steve Pearce, for all their advocacy and work as well on behalf of the community. Thank you.

BOB KEEPER EASTER APPEAL

Ms PATTEN (Northern Metropolitan) (09:58): I have been asked to use my members statement to call on members and to encourage members to remember Bob Keeper. Father Bob has relaunched his Bob Keeper appeal for this Easter, and this year he is hoping to expand his open pantry project, which is out at Banksia Gardens in Broadmeadows. Currently it helps 400 families fill their pantries twice a week. He is hoping that this year his appeal will be able to extend that assistance to another 100 families. These families are largely refugee families, largely from Syria, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Lebanon.

Father Bob is also providing funds for soccer scholarships with the Melbourne City Football Club academy. Last year he was able to provide three scholarships, which was wonderful, to Ali, Mumtaz and Sajjad. They really were so grateful for the opportunity. What it does is provide this fantastic protective factor and provide this great protection for these young kids, many of whom have grown up with disadvantage and escaped war-torn areas. So on behalf of Father Bob, I would like to encourage us all to support Bob Keeper and give generously in 2022.

ALF GOLDBURG OAM

Mr TARLAMIS (South Eastern Metropolitan) (10:00): On Monday we laid to rest Alfred 'Alf' Goldberg OAM, a renowned local character who was widely known and universally loved. He will

be sorely missed. There is much that could be said about Alf. First and foremost he was a man who lived his values. He was a man who knew about service. He served his country in the Second World War, and he served his community throughout his long life. Throughout the many years I knew him he worked tirelessly as a volunteer in many roles in the local community that he loved. Whether it be at the Noble Park RSL, through the Springvale Benevolent Society, by helping neighbours with food and groceries or by just having a chat, he was always generous with his time. Raised during the Great Depression, he knew what it was like to go without, so he was always willing to dig deep to help others.

Despite the challenges he faced in life, he was never one to complain and was always thinking of others. He was welcoming and accepting and proud of his country and the diversity of those who came to join it and also call it home. A stalwart of the Labor Party for many decades, and in particular Dandenong North branch, he was renowned for dedicating many hours at the early voting centres in the lead-up to election days, wearing his distinctive hat covered in labour movement badges.

Alf had the title of world's oldest paperboy, retiring at the age of 70 but continuing to deliver papers to elderly neighbours well into his 90s and to the Dandenong and District Historical Society, never missing an issue of the *Dandenong Star Journal*, ordered by date, to become part of the society's vast collection of local history.

Alf was awarded an Order of Australia Medal in 2019 for his decades of community service. I send my condolences to the Goldburg family—Audrey, Joseph, Dallas, Oscar, Hayley and Jessica—for their loss. It is time to rest now, Alfie. You will be missed but never forgotten. Vale, Alf Goldburg.

PARKVILLE YOUTH PREVENTION AND RECOVERY CARE CENTRE

Ms WATT (Northern Metropolitan) (10:02): Young people in the inner north now have better access to mental health support thanks to the brand new, 20-bed youth prevention and recovery care centre in Parkville opened yesterday with the Premier and Minister for Mental Health. This will be a special place for young people, and I am delighted to have followed its construction closely from the first sod turn in November 2020 up until yesterday's celebration. This world-class facility will provide around-the-clock clinical care for at-risk young people between the ages of 16 and 25. It is one of five new facilities around the state which are safe spaces for youths in crisis to be adequately cared for in their recovery.

As part of the tour we also announced the commencement of the HOPE and Hospital in the Home services. HOPE stands for 'hospital outreach post-suicidal engagement', and this service will do incredible work supporting individuals and their support networks following a suicide attempt. It is an essential service, and I am proud to be part of an Andrews Labor government that has committed to delivering every single one of the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System. We are rebuilding our mental health system from the ground up to ensure that every Victorian can receive the support and care they most richly deserve. It is the biggest social reform in our state's history, and only a Labor government is able to deliver it. Can I thank the staff from that centre, who were so gracious and generous in hosting our tour yesterday, in particular Thomas—you are a bit of a legend, and I wish you all the best.

LEARN LOCAL AWARDS

Mr MELHEM (Western Metropolitan)

Incorporated pursuant to order of Council of 7 September 2021:

Last week, on behalf of Minister Tierney I announced the launch of the 2022 Learn Local Awards.

Since 2006, the Adult, Community and Further Education Board has presented annual awards for Victoria's Learn Local network.

These awards are an opportunity to celebrate the amazing contribution of the learners, trainers, and providers that make this sector great.

I announced the launch at Glen Eira Adult Learning Centre, where Manager Philippa Caris was nominated for the 2021 Victorian Learn Local Leadership Award.

This nomination recognised her strong leadership of the centre since 2011, in which she has strived to create a positive environment for staff and learners.

Philippa's outstanding leadership has meant that the centre is meeting the needs of Melbourne's diverse south-eastern suburbs, ensuring learners are getting the skills they need for study, work, and life. She was a worthy finalist.

Victoria's Learn Local network contributes so much to the Victorian economy and local communities—a contribution that is often underappreciated.

As a vital component of Victoria's post-secondary education system, the Learn Local network provides individualised and flexible training courses to learners that need it, especially learners with limited prior educational attainment.

The Learn Local Awards are the perfect opportunity for the Andrews Labor government, alongside the Adult, Community and Further Education Board, to acknowledge the importance of the sector and the outcomes it achieves.

Individual category winners receive \$5000 in prize money and program category winners receive \$10 000. All remaining finalists receive \$1000.

So if anyone knows of an achievement in the sector that they believe should be recognised and celebrated, I encourage you to submit a nomination!

Further details can be found at: www.vic.gov.au/learn-local-awards.

BACK TO BACK THEATRE

Ms TIERNEY (Western Victoria—Minister for Training and Skills, Minister for Higher Education)

Incorporated pursuant to order of Council of 7 September 2021:

It is with great pleasure that I rise today to congratulate Geelong's Back to Back Theatre for an outstanding accomplishment on the world stage, winning the International Ibsen Award.

Back to Back's ensemble and artists, under the direction of Bruce Gladwin for 22 years, are all neurodiverse, and their productions emphasise their commentary on broad social and cultural themes with a clear message that values equality and diversity.

This is an extraordinary achievement for unique, challenging theatre based in regional Victoria.

The prize of nearly \$400 000 will enable the company to extend their creativity and to develop new productions.

No strangers to international performance, they will take *The Shadow Whose Prey the Hunter Becomes*, which I have seen, and *Ganesh Versus the Third Reich* to Oslo where they will formally accept their award.

SOPHIE MOLAN

Ms TIERNEY (Western Victoria—Minister for Training and Skills, Minister for Higher Education)

Incorporated pursuant to order of Council of 7 September 2021:

On another note, how fantastic it is to see leadership from young women like Terang's Sophie Molan, who has joined her family business to work in quarries driving 50 tonnes of earthmoving machinery.

Sophie made a drastic change in career direction and completed her certificate III in civil construction (plant operations) through Geelong's Gordon TAFE and, in doing so, won the Gordon Building and Construction Excellence Award 2021.

In Sophie's words, she is the first girl to take on this work for WA Molan and Sons and says, 'It feels like a win because I can show them that I can do it too'.

Sophie is a great example for women who are being encouraged by this government with programs to remove barriers in traditionally male-dominated jobs, such as the \$5 million women-in-trades fund and our women in construction strategy, which began in 2019.

Congratulations to all of these great Western Victorians.

Production of documents

EMERGENCY SERVICES TELECOMMUNICATIONS AUTHORITY

Ms CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (10:03): I move:

That this house:

- (1) notes that the Emergency Services Telecommunications Authority (ESTA) reported over \$15 million of consultancies listed in its annual reports since 2014, of which no final reports have been released; and
- (2) requires, in accordance with standing order 11.01, the Leader of the Government to table in the Council, within 14 calendar days of the house agreeing to this resolution, all final reports or, if a final report is not available, an interim or draft report for the consultancies commissioned by ESTA since 4 December 2014.

This is a simple documents motion that I am moving today in the interests of transparency and for the Victorian community to understand exactly what has been undertaken—the work that the government has commissioned—through these various consultancies. That is why this motion is important—that we have the release of those various reports.

In moving this motion I would like to say that I do not think this needs to be a long debate. I think there are other important motions on the paper that we need to be debating today. I particularly want to make reference to the important motion that has been put on the paper by Mr Atkinson in relation to the Ukraine conflict, a very important motion that I think the house will want to debate.

I want to make just a few points, and of course the government will want to make their points on my motion, but as I said, I do not envisage this being an extensive debate. The \$15 million that the government has spent on the various consultancies for ESTA I think is important for us to understand, as I mentioned. There are numerous reviews that have taken place into the call and dispatch system, the CAD, and various other consultancies that are listed in the ESTA annual report. I want to just highlight a couple, and there are dozens of them—I mean, I have got papers full of the listed consultancies here. I do not want to waste time in reading all of those out, but there was, for instance, \$5700 spent for Brockhurst Consulting to offer career coaching and transition-to-retirement advice. There was a \$21 000 contract between 2020 and 2022: that was awarded to FPL Advisory to develop a government stakeholder engagement plan and conduct an organisation risk review. Now, I know this may be a little sensitive for the government, because a former Labor candidate, Steve Cusworth, runs FPL Advisory. So I think, again in the interest of transparency, we need to see what some of these reviews are about.

Importantly there is one from PricewaterhouseCoopers, an internal audit service; it was almost half a million dollars—\$489 000—for that review. These internal audit reviews are important, because we want to understand—that was undertaken in 2019 and 2020—what the outcomes are from those reviews. Of course with ESTA we know that in 2016 following the storm asthma event, where tragically 10 people died, there was a call at that point to have ESTA reviewed and a need for more people to be within ESTA working on its being able to respond to Victorians when they put through a 000 call.

Of course over the last two years you have heard me in this chamber and outside the chamber speak of the failures of 000 and the government's lack of preparation and planning to deal with what we have been experiencing in recent months. Sadly 12 people, including four children, have died since October because of the failures in being able to get through to 000, and they are well reported across media. I am not going to prosecute those cases, but these are failures that are happening now. Over the last two years of course we have had challenges with COVID—no-one is denying that—but do not forget we have had six lockdowns in Victoria, and we were told by the government that we needed to be in lockdown to prepare the health system. Well, 000 is part of the health system. When you have had warnings as far back as 2016 that there is a severe shortage and those issues have not been addressed, then the dozens and dozens of consultancies that have been undertaken surely need to be

in the public domain. That is what this documents motion is calling for: that we have that transparency to understand exactly what those reports and reviews were and that the public has an opportunity to understand the findings.

I note that the 2021–22 contracts that have been listed for all of these expenditures do not include legal advice or advice on individual employment-related matters, so that is an additional cost to the \$15 million that we know of that has been spent on these consultancies. We do need to understand that—of course Victorians want to understand that—because these millions of dollars could have been put into supporting our frontline healthcare workers such as doctors, nurses, paramedics but importantly the ESTA call takers. That simply has not been done under this government. As you know, I have been speaking about the fact that the federal government has been calling for that because of the pressure put on Telstra around the country with what was happening with the emergency calls in other states; the failures in Victoria were putting pressure on the system right around the nation. It was a concern of the federal minister, Paul Fletcher, who wrote to the minister last year about these very issues.

Now, I say again these are important matters. I do not think I need to say much more. I think it is fairly self-explanatory. There are about 60-odd consultancies listed here, pages and pages of them, adding up to \$15 million in taxpayers money. I think in the interests of transparency that they need to be released—not delayed; they need to be released. I do not want any more excuses from the government. We need to see what the findings were, because of the tragedy that has occurred in this state. It is 12 people in the last few months. We know there were other cases—November 2020—where somebody died from an inability to get through to 000. So the coroner will be looking at many of these issues, and those findings will come out. But it is pretty evident that there have been significant concerns, and it is a tragedy that so many Victorians have lost their lives through these failures.

In the interests of what I think is an important motion—this is a simple motion to release these reports—I will conclude my remarks here. I would hope that the government will take the opportunity to support this motion so that very quickly we can then move on to the very important motion that is listed on the notice paper, put forward by Mr Atkinson, and that is for the chamber to also debate the Ukraine crisis.

Ms SHING (Eastern Victoria) (10:12): I rise today to speak in relation to this documents motion, and at the outset I note Ms Crozier's opening remarks that this is a relatively straightforward motion seeking documentation in relation to the subject matter that she has already taken us through. That is true on the one hand, but then what we hear is a range of matters in the course of Ms Crozier's contribution which go to the subject matter of the emergency services response and ESTA. So I think it is then incumbent upon me in getting to my feet immediately after Ms Crozier to actually address a number of those issues and indeed a number of the matters which are put repeatedly in this place that are either not true or in fact a source of deep grief, distress and frustration for not only people who have been immediately impacted by the challenges and shortcomings in the system, which I will come to later, that we have addressed in recent announcements but also the call takers, who work under the most extraordinary amount of pressure and who I would suggest, in the course of this debate and discussion and the narrative that has been advanced by those opposite, are being politicised for really improper purposes.

I want to put on record our deep thanks, respect and acknowledgement for the hard work, the really emotional work, the really draining and traumatic work, which call takers undertake. This is a job which has ranged in substance from call-outs from distressed, distraught and frustrated families through to individuals concerned about their health and which has also ranged across people who have contacted emergency services for non-emergency-related matters, and as the Minister for Emergency Services in this place has said on numerous occasions, it is really important that 000 is there for emergencies but also that people know about the range of other assistance measures that are available. That has been part of a public campaign, and indeed that is an important part of making sure that

emergencies are triaged in the right way to the right areas whereby assistance and support can be provided as needed.

I want to pick up on a number of things that Ms Crozier has referred to on the use of consultants, which is part of the documents motion on the notice paper today. It is more than a little rich for those opposite to talk about the use of consultancies and the assertions being made by Ms Crozier that this constitutes either a misuse of funds or funds that can or indeed should be redeployed or repurposed to fund nurses, for example. What an extraordinary position to have been taken by Ms Crozier on behalf of the opposition. It is not that long ago—in fact it was 2014—that it was realised that the former Liberal government, of which Ms Crozier was a part, had the sustainable government initiative that in fact took 4000 employees from the Victorian public service and outsourced that work to consultants. Now, this is not just something which I am standing here to criticise today in highlighting the hypocrisy of what we see opposite, calling for information about consultants, and I will get to the substance of where we sit at the moment relative to the track record of those opposite. It was something which the Ombudsman actually called into question in a report which found that in fact the proposal of the sustainable government initiative which resulted in this 4000 VPS job reduction, as far as direct employment goes, appeared to fall foul of the Fair Work Act. This is something which those opposite do not really seem to care about—that in fact when it comes to workers, when it comes to employees, when it comes to—

Ms Crozier: On a point of order, Acting President, this is a fairly narrow motion calling on the government to release these reports from the consultancies undertaken. Ms Shing is talking about past history, but it has nothing to do with this motion, so I would ask you to call her back to the specifics of this motion and address them.

Ms SHING: Further to the point of order, Acting President, Ms Crozier began her contribution by saying it was a relatively narrow motion—the same template that Mr Davis uses—and then in fact went on to traverse exactly the same material that she is now seeking I not actually put onto the record.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Bourman): Ms Shing is the lead government speaker. She is entitled to a little bit of leeway, but I would ask her to try and keep it as narrow as possible.

Ms SHING: Thanks, Acting President. I am looking forward to keeping my response to the lead speaker of the opposition as narrow as possible in responding directly to the matters which Ms Crozier has put on record. I would encourage anyone who is interested in the context by which I have set out the position of the sustainable government initiative to actually have a look at what Ms Crozier has said in her opening remarks, and perhaps people who are watching along can make their own decisions about the extent to which what I have said is relevant—

Ms Crozier interjected.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Bourman): Ms Crozier! Let us just get this going, please.

Ms SHING: It would appear that whenever this is raised in the context of broader history Ms Crozier is very sensitive, so I am going to move on.

What we see here in the overall expenditure of funding for consultancies is around 1 per cent of the total envelope that is available—that is in fact less being spent on consultancies by this government than the comparator in history that Ms Crozier so stridently objects to being put on the record. We have a lot of work to do, however, and nobody is shying away from that. There is so much work to do in response to the pandemic, in response to events such as thunderstorm asthma and significant emergencies—in relation to the subject that Ms Crozier herself has raised—and in response to the enormously traumatic individual circumstances which have been discussed at length in this place. So I do not want there to be any aspersion cast that there is not a long way to go, because there is. And this work needs to continue across governments and across all jurisdictions, and to that end I am looking forward to there being progress on matters raised at a national level. And I am looking forward

to the minister being able to advance the issues, including as they relate to telephony and carrier matters. And I am looking forward to continuing the work associated with funding to address these issues. As the minister has outlined in response to various questions by Ms Crozier and indeed others in this place and more broadly, there has needed to be a response which is not only about recruitment and not only about workforce training and development but also about significant resourcing.

The \$115 million which was recently announced to improve service delivery and also to support staff at ESTA is an actual and symbolic recognition of the work that needs to be done. The package which has been announced, which the minister has discussed, including in response to questions from Ms Crozier in this place on many occasions, is about making sure that we can recruit an additional 50 ambulance call takers and dispatchers and making sure that we are also in a position to attract, recruit, train and retain employees in this valuable work. That is about valuing the contribution that people make to the workforce, and that is about making sure that all of these new positions are online by mid-2023.

Back to the narrow motion which Ms Crozier has begun our discussion on this morning, documents motions in this place are considered really carefully by this government. And we have always, in comparison to our predecessors, released more information than they ever did. On that basis we look forward to continuing to assess this documents motion, as we do every documents motion, save for matters such as cabinet in confidence, commercial in confidence and privilege, which Ms Crozier rolls her eyes at but is otherwise very happy to be part of a government which raises the same issues when they sit on this side of the chamber to object in the same terms. We look forward to making sure that this documents motion is given the respect that it deserves and, most importantly, that we provide assistance, funding, recognition and support to all at ESTA—to call takers, paramedics and our health workforce.

Ms BURNETT-WAKE (Eastern Victoria) (10:22): Good governance requires transparency. I think we can all agree on that. Ms Crozier's motion is about transparency, okay? ESTA is failing Victorians. People are dying. People are ringing 000 and not getting through. I have stood in this chamber before and spoken about this. Constituents of mine who are sick, worried, scared and having heart attacks are not being able to get through. \$15 million on consultants—we need to know what this money is being spent on. There is a list here—lots and lots and lots of money. Where is all this going? Where is this being spent? We need to know. Victorians deserve better. We deserve a system that works. We deserve to be able to call 000 and get the help and support we need. This motion, again, is about releasing information that will give us information about what is being spent. We need to know. That is all from me.

Mr GEPP (Northern Victoria) (10:24): Eight minutes—oh, my goodness. I thought, 'Gee, I've been given a haircut straight off the top'. Throughout the pandemic we have heard again and again and again from those opposite. They want to question the health decisions that are made. They want to attack the people in the very front lines of our health system: the paramedics, the nurses, the doctors, the orderlies, the ward clerks, the call takers. Again and again and again they walk in here and they say that they are deficient, that they are not doing their jobs, that they are failing Victorians.

Well, we on this side of the house actually do not think that they are failing at all. We do not think that they are failing at all; we think that they have done a superb job. I can only imagine in the last 2½ years the pressure that our nurses, our doctors, our orderlies, our paramedics and our ward clerks have been under—our ancillary care providers, our aged care workers—dealing with a global pandemic the likes of which none of us in this place have ever seen before, and they have been doing such a wonderful job. But what do we get from those opposite, rather than congratulations? I do not think I have heard a thankyou. I do not think I have heard so much as a thankyou from those opposite to those people who have put themselves on the front line.

Mr Leane: The Prime Minister said that he saved 40 000 people.

Mr GEPP: The Prime Minister saved 40 000 people—what, in Hawaii? Bit hard to do it from Hawaii.

Mr Leane: I don't know. Apparently all those workers you mentioned—

Mr GEPP: Mr Morrison saved them, did he? 40 000, goodness me.

Mr Finn: On a point of order, President, I am just wondering if you could clarify: is Mr Gepp or the minister speaking on this particular motion at the moment?

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Melhem): Mr Gepp to continue his contribution on this motion.

Mr GEPP: Thank you. The minister has talked about the challenges in our health sector. Both the Minister for Health and the Premier, and every other minister in this government as well as every member of the government, have talked about the challenges that this pandemic has placed on our system. Indeed that was the very reason for many of the actions that have been taken over the last 2½ years—because we knew the devastating impact that the pandemic was going to have on our health system and it was so, so important that the health system did not collapse and that we did everything that we possibly could by way of the actions that we took. Whether it was lockdowns, whether it was wearing of masks—whatever it happened to be—everybody on this side of the house has repeatedly got up and talked about those challenges and how wonderfully proud we are of the workforce that have stood on the front line and done their utmost.

Mr Leane interjected.

Mr GEPP: And they have saved tens of thousands of lives, Mr Leane. It is just extraordinary, extraordinary work. Many people, I think, in this place have got family members who are healthcare workers—nieces that are nurses, and my sister is an aged care worker. Many people in our family structures are frontline healthcare workers, and you only have to see and talk to those people about what they have endured over the last 2½ to three years—and they deserve better. They deserve better than for this place to occupy itself with frivolous motions being brought forward by the opposition. I mean, this ought to be a day where the opposition can shine, but I have got to say, in the last six footy seasons certainly that I have been here, what a disappointment. They have been kicking into the wind with a heavy football—

Mr Leane interjected.

Mr GEPP: It is not healthy for democracy. It is not healthy for democracy, and Victorians deserve better. They deserve an opposition that comes in here and really takes it up to the government and advances new policy ideas—new public policy ideas—and does the work. Instead all we get is 'we want documents' motions.

Fortunately for me personally I was not here when they last occupied the Treasury benches. But those that were here tell me that in terms of documents, they just refused. I think there were two—was it two? Two in the whole time that they were in government. Yet we on this side release them. Unless there is a cabinet-in-confidence matter or some sort of legal impediment, we release them; we put them out there. But instead what this is about, the motivation from those opposite, is nothing more than trying to create the impression that there is something corrupt, that there is something bad, that there is something evil going on. They want to point their fingers at organisations like ESTA.

Again, I cannot imagine what it is like to be an ESTA call taker. I used to be an adviser to the emergency services minister, so I certainly had interactions with ESTA and had on occasions the need to talk to some of those call takers, and when you hear some of the stories, some of the things that those call takers have to deal with, these are real-life emergencies that our call takers are dealing with. And they do deserve support, and they have had additional support from the government—43 additional call takers, an additional \$27.5 million in October last year to scale up activities. We know that demand for ESTA services, call taker services, has skyrocketed in recent times, I think at

one point almost reaching 50 per cent above normal capacity. It went off the charts. That is why we provided a further \$115.6 million package to bring on more call takers, better support and manage the workforce and deliver recruitment.

But those opposite, they continue with this jihad against ESTA. They continue to criticise those that are on the front line doing everything that they possibly can. Well, we do not criticise those people. We thank them and we celebrate them.

Ms Crozier: We're not criticising the people, we're criticising the government.

Mr GEPP: Well, just as well you are not in New South Wales, Ms Crozier, because wouldn't you be challenged right now? What would you do with the nurses responding to the government's lack of support up there for the nursing sector? They have taken the only action that is available to them. Wouldn't it be challenging for you? What would you do? You would be very, very conflicted. What would you do? Would you do what you did when those same challenges were confronting you a few years ago? We know exactly what you did. You crossed the line, you did not support those people. You are not supporting them now. Shame on you. We want to thank and congratulate the ESTA workforce—

Ms Crozier: On a point of order, President, this is a simple, narrow motion. It is not an opportunity for Mr Gepp to attack the opposition like he is. This is a simple motion about \$15 million of consultancies and for the government to release those documents in the interests of the Victorian community, and I ask you to draw him back to this very simple motion so that we can move on to the very important Ukraine motion.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Melhem): I think Mr Gepp has got 20 seconds to conclude his remarks, but I just remind members, with notices of motion people have got a bit of leeway to expand things, but to get back to the motion is important as well.

Mr GEPP: I will come back to the motion, Acting President. Thank you for your guidance. I will just say that the simplicity of this document motion just underscores the fact that we have got the worst opposition in this state's history.

Ms TAYLOR (Southern Metropolitan) (10:34): Here we are again, but anyway. So first of all, I think what is disappointing with regard to this motion is we are seeing yet again this kind of scattergun approach. It really is about political pointscoring at the end of the day. It is not a search for anything in particular. It is a search for evidence that the opposition can use in that regard, and it is a demand that would require ESTA to spend time and resources going through years of reports that may not even relate to the issue at hand at a time when they need all hands on deck.

What does this actually do? What does this actually mean? This pulls people off the floor to put them in a back room trying to find minor consulting work done almost a decade ago. Well done to the opposition—that is a terrific achievement. Gee, you are really helping the ESTA staff with this motion, and thank you so much. I say, as we are here in this chamber, I know they do incredible work. It is very emotionally demanding. They are obviously dealing with some of the most precarious situations that we could possibly imagine. But that is great—take them off the floor. Put them out the back to go on this scattergun hunt for something you can raise, put on a tweet—I do not know, whatever it is—and move away and distract from the issue at hand. We, on the other hand, think that we should help ESTA here and now, improving call answer speeds and supporting frontline staff. That is the position that we take on our side of the fence, and our government has backed them in to do this with record funding and support as well as strong public messaging—whilst those opposite have sought to undermine their efforts and send ESTA staff on increasingly bizarre research projects. I am just stating it for what it is. It may be unpalatable to those opposite, but if you are going to open the door and you are going to ask questions we have every right to address them with facts.

Now, the opposition are looking for evidence that we have not supported ESTA in reports that may not relate at all to the call-taking and dispatch services. Why would they do that? I mean, why? ESTA has experienced significant demand in the past during the thunderstorm asthma events. I note that that was mentioned, and that is fair enough within the context of this discussion—absolutely. Those thunderstorm asthma events occurred back in 2016. There was an inspector-general for emergency management (IGEM) review into this event. That is publicly available, and the government provided a response with clear actions to improve ESTA services. So when the matter of transparency is raised, can we just make that clear on the table?

I note further—and this is a critical point because when we are nuancing these particular issues and events we have to be very, very careful within the context of what we are speaking about—when we are talking about the IGEM review with regard to the thunderstorm asthma events in 2016, that was over a 24- to 48-hour period. It was incredibly significant, so I am not in any way diminishing the impact of that particular weather event. However, we are talking about ESTA experiencing that level of demand and more for months, so can we be very, very factually correct? When you make strong statements in this chamber, noting that those ESTA staff are likely to be listening to the debate and hearing very strong criticism of outcomes, ultimately it would be naive to think they might not feel somehow that they are being maligned as well, and they should not in any way be maligned. But that is the grave risk when we go on these scattergun kinds of witch-hunts. We have to think about the real consequences for those out there who are doing the real hard work to save lives.

We note that those opposite, if I come to the specifics of the motion, are looking for evidence in consultancy reviews. We have delivered major investment to support ESTA, and we have commissioned a review into ESTA by former police commissioner Graham Ashton. I know that is well known, but I am emphasising it here because we have groundhog day. There is a bit of a nuance here because we are talking about consultancy reports, but fundamentally it is about smashing up ESTA—and it is not a pretty debate at all. Do those opposite think many of these reports the motion seeks will have any impact—and this is what I think is really important—on the effects of COVID-19, staff furloughing in the omicron wave or surges in demand of 30 to 40 per cent? Do they really think that this exercise, this political exercise here, will achieve any significant outcome in that regard? I proffer no. In fact I am going to say emphatically no. That is what we are dealing with, and we have immediate measures in place, a review underway and strong ongoing oversight from IGEM.

I also understand that the Minister for Emergency Services met with Tony Pearce, the inspector-general for emergency management, just to give a full explanation to IGEM, as I stated previously, to give assurance that the government is doing everything and that ESTA is doing everything it can do to fix the crisis. Not only was the answer yes, but there was a further message that the opposition should pay heed to: we have put in place immediate measures, continued to meet with agencies and provided record funding, and IGEM is 100 per cent satisfied that government and ESTA are doing everything that can be done to address the unprecedented level of demand.

We know throughout the pandemic that those opposite have done everything they can to pretend there is no pandemic, to dispute health advice and to undermine health advice every step of the way. I do not know how many debates we have had in the chamber with, ‘Get them out the back’. Every time: ‘Masks—don’t wear masks. Don’t do that. Heaven forbid you should prevent the spread of COVID-19. Don’t wear the masks. Oh, my God. Don’t do that. Oh, my God’.

Members interjecting.

Ms TAYLOR: And there is another clear message in all this: let us let ESTA do their job—how about that? Instead of inflating ourselves with self-importance in this chamber over this very politicised debate, let us let them just get on with the job. How is that for a change? Instead of telling ourselves we are really doing something magical in this motion, let us actually let them get on with what they are doing.

We have been saying in this place for some time now that we are providing record support and we all need to back ESTA—all of us. How about we all get on and back ESTA and back those workers who are doing an amazing job on our behalf, instead of smashing the crap out of them in the chamber, to be blunt, because when you go over and over and over reworking and reworking an issue with a political angle that we cannot give credence to—

Ms Crozier: On a point of order, Acting President, I know the member is quite animated in her debate, but I do not think that last line, using an expletive in here, is parliamentary. Also it was completely inaccurate, and I would ask you to ask the member to withdraw.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Gepp): Ms Taylor, I would ask you to withdraw that comment.

Ms TAYLOR: I will withdraw. If we come back to the issue of consultancies, I would note that since 2014 less than 1 per cent of ESTA's total expenditure has gone towards consultancies. So we just need a bit of perspective on this issue. But it is not a huge surprise that those opposite would raise consultancies, given their familiarity with them, having spent a huge \$360 million on consultants in the short time when they were last in office. Just a little bit of perspective—I know this is a really sensitive point in the chamber, but let us just have a little bit of perspective on that issue. On their watch ESTA spent more per year on consultants compared to the period we have been in government. \$2.1 million per year was spent on consulting by ESTA between 2010 and 2014, while \$1.8 million per year has been spent since 2014. I am just providing some perspective with regard to the documents motion that we have in front of us.

In that regard our government wholeheartedly backs in and supports ESTA workers. We know the very difficult job that they undertake on our behalf, and we thank them—and this is an ongoing gratitude—for the incredible sacrifices that they make to save Victorian lives.

Mr MELHEM (Western Metropolitan) (10:44): I also rise to speak on this motion, yet another documents motion by the opposition. Funnily enough, it is not from Mr Davis; normally Mr Davis is the chief of documents motions for the opposition. Ms Crozier was allowed to put up a notice of motion about documents.

I just go back to the time Mr Davis was in charge of this place as the Leader of the Government. He would have had the numbers, 21 to 19 from my recollection—I was here. Every single documents motion that was moved either by the opposition or by the Greens, by anyone, was denied—denied, denied, denied. Now I hear the opposition from time to time talk about, 'Well, what have you got to hide? We're only asking for documents. Give us the documents to have a look at'. Well, we are not hiding anything. In fact we have probably broken the record for any government releasing documents to the opposition and to the Parliament, and we have not blocked any documents motion. I could be corrected, but I do not think we have, to my recollection. We have provided documents.

Where I have got a problem with this particular motion is that it is not actually requesting documents in relation to cabinet issues or ministerial stuff. In fact in this most difficult time we are facing in Victoria, with the pandemic and the pressure on ESTA and the hardworking emergency services personnel, particularly those directly employed by ESTA, who do a terrific job—they are working so hard under difficult circumstances to deliver the best service possible to Victorians—this motion is actually attacking their integrity and their credibility. This motion is basically saying, 'We want to know. We want you to stop doing your day job. We want you to drop everything and go and look for documents that we want to look at, going back to 2014'. It is not asking a minister for basically ministerial documents about consultants the minister may have engaged; it is asking ESTA. Lawfully they actually do as part of everyday business actually engage consultants from time to time to provide legal services, specialised services and so on.

As a matter of fact, I think as Ms Taylor pointed out, looking at some of the numbers, funnily enough they are only looking back to 2014—so just the term of this government—so you can tell they are not interested in what the documents may have in them; it is just basically a political stunt, trying to find

something in there that they can use for political ends. They have done that pretty well in the last 2½ years; they have challenged every single bit of medical advice, every decision. If we had left it to this lot, I tell you, we would have had mayhem in the street, we would have had more people dying from COVID and we would have seen the economy totally collapse.

I mean, look at their chief leader, the Prime Minister. National cabinet, the national medical officer and all the medical officers in the country have said, ‘You should maintain isolation for seven days’. He comes out and says, ‘Oh, no, I agree’—with those opposite’s beloved team and coach—‘that we should actually suspend the seven days isolation’. I mean, he is the leader of the country, a member of the Liberal Party, like Mr Davis and Ms Crozier. Basically they do not care about the medical advice. Their own chief medical officer said, ‘Maintain it’, and they say, ‘Oh, it’s the premiers’. I mean, seriously, are these people fair dinkum?

We talk about ESTA spending \$15 million since 2014 on consultancy reports. I just briefly looked at the record: I think from 2010 to 2014 the average when they were in charge and Mr Davis was the health minister was that they spent about \$2.1 million per year; ESTA currently averages about \$1.8 million. So it is not like suddenly, ‘Oh, God, ESTA is spending a lot of money on consultants, and therefore we need to find out. Maybe because they’re spending so much money there are not enough resources to actually answer the calls’. If they are coming from that side of the debate and that is what they are thinking, maybe you could say it is a fair point—but they are not. They are just looking for dirt, if they can find any dirt, and that is really disgusting. That is appalling. We should be out there supporting our emergency services. We should be supporting ESTA. The government is currently having a review conducted by one of the most respected public servants—which everyone can agree on—Graham Ashton, to tell us what further improvements we can make.

We have got a new person in charge of ESTA and also doing the review—Mr Leane, an excellent public servant—trying to find the best way we can improve that. We have put in additional resources to make sure that we employ more people. We know we have got a problem. We know there is an issue. We need to be able to cope with things like pandemics. That is why the government has put in the extra resources and investment to make sure we employ more people to be able to answer the calls. Fifty people being put on now will be trained at a dedicated training centre to make sure there is an extra 50 people able to answer these calls, and they will be ready to go in the next six to 12 months. To become an ESTA operator is not something you can just pick off the shelf—just employ someone off the street and, bang, you are fully qualified and now you can actually perform these duties. No, it is a very complex process to be able to select the right people to be able to do that job. That is why we are establishing a training centre to make sure we are going forward. That is one of the learnings from what happened recently—to be able to fully train people going forward. They will have a certificate II, I think, to be able to do their job properly.

The opposition is basically not interested in how we can fix the ESTA situation, how we can support these dedicated staff who are actually doing tremendous work. They are more interested in picking dirt and finding a fault here or there. Going back to what I said earlier, I get it. If you make a documents motion about cabinet decisions about something or a minister hiring heaps of consultants to do something, we can say we can see where they are coming from. But with this one they are basically seeking—with an agency doing tremendous work at the most difficult time; they are under enormous pressure—to me, to question the integrity of the people working at ESTA. They are questioning their hard work. That is what that tells me, and that is really shameful—that is shameful. Get on with the program. Stand up and defend these hardworking people.

I would be happy to be on the same ticket as them if they came back and said, ‘Look, we’re not doing enough. We need to do more. We need to support all these people. We’ve got all these bright ideas and suggestions for how we can improve the working environment and make sure ESTA can operate at a higher level and be able to respond to all these calls’. Come up with constructive ideas instead of trying to use this for political pointscoring and as a political football.

But as Mr Gepp said earlier, they cannot even kick straight, they cannot even kick the football—it is like it has been really wet. Basically these guys are all over the place. Thank God they are on the other side and they are not occupying government benches. And the way they are going, they will probably never get there. I think in this difficult time our role as parliamentarians is to support emergency services workers, not to pour a bucket of—no, I had better be careful here; it could be ruled out as unparliamentary. Instead of sort of rubbishing the work of our emergency services workers we should be supporting them. We should be out there defending them. We should be congratulating them and honouring the work they do on our behalf to keep us safe. With these comments, I will just leave it at that. I will say to the opposition: just get on with it. Stop playing games. Stop playing politics.

Mr TARLAMIS (South Eastern Metropolitan) (10:54): I also rise to make a contribution on Ms Crozier's motion. Well, it is another Wednesday, it is another documents motion, and it is yet another attempt from those opposite to score cheap political points at the expense of our hardworking staff who are doing everything possible to respond to the unprecedented pandemic and protect our state. It is such a disappointing thing to see that such an important issue would be politicised, but unfortunately it is what we have come to expect time and time again when we come to this place on a Wednesday: the politicisation of such important issues.

It is consistent with what we have seen throughout the pandemic from those opposite: they choose to question every single health decision and every single effort by frontline workers, who are seeking to protect Victorians. They pursue political agendas as opposed to the health of Victorians. Time and time again over consecutive sitting weeks for as long as I can remember the minister on this side of the chamber has spoken at length and answered many questions from the opposition about ESTA and the surge in demand that is currently being faced. She has not sought to duck any of these questions. She has answered questions consistently. She has provided explanations, she has provided advice, she has responded to questioning, and yet again there is this consistent barrage of misinformation being spread, misconstruing of information and continuing to mislead the public about what is going on. There is no doubt that the ESTA workers are under immense pressure and that there has been a massive increase in the number of calls as a result of the pandemic and what is being faced. No-one is hiding from that; no-one is denying that. Everyone has been up-front about that, and steps are being taken to address that. But those opposite seek to continue to try and find more fodder and spread misinformation on social media. It is about filling their social media channels and cheap political pointscoring rather than anything else.

It is factual: there has been a huge spike in call numbers, and that has meant that some calls are waiting too long. Both the interim CEO, Stephen Leane, and the minister have made it clear that any delays are unacceptable. That is why the government has been getting on with the job and backing in the amazing staff at ESTA, introducing immediate measures to improve call-answering speed and hiring more call takers and dispatchers. We have provided additional funding and additional workers to take calls and additional support to assist them. But the opposition's scattergun approach and attacks on ESTA have not helped the situation, and they will not help the situation. It is not supporting the staff. It is creating even more stress for the staff, who are already doing it tough and working hard and working tirelessly to assist people.

Creating this misinformation and demonising the workforce, which you have been doing, is not providing any assistance. It is not assisting in this space whatsoever. It is simply making the circumstances worse. You are not helping. It is just highlighting the fact that you are irrelevant and you are not an alternative government. You are sending a clear message to the public that you are not fit to govern. I mean, we already knew that you were not fit to govern. We already know that you do not stand for anything. That is clear to us, but you are simply putting that advertisement out there for everyone else to see. We see it each and every day, but you are putting it up in neon lights for everyone else to see. Time and time again when the rubber hits the road you are found wanting, and you take the low road and criticise every single issue that comes before us.

This is not seeking solutions or seeking to address the issue or the underlying causes of what is going on here. This is a search for anything—it is just a scattergun approach to try and find anything to add to your social media feed so that you can continue to talk about any old thing that satisfies your own egos rather than trying to assist with anything that might help Victorians or trying to address the issues or the uptake in the surge of calls that is occurring at ESTA. You do not even know what you are actually looking for. This scattergun approach to requesting these massive amounts of documents will actually pull people—workers—off the floor and put them in back rooms trying to find minor consulting work done almost a decade ago. You do not even know what you actually want from these reports, but these workers will trawl through these reports. It will take them off the floor, which again will not solve any problems whatsoever.

But again, you are hopeful that you might come across something that you can use, as opposed to addressing any issues whatsoever. We think that we should help ESTA here and now to improve call answering speeds and support frontline staff. Our government has backed them in to do this with record funding and support as well as strong public messaging, while those opposite have sought to undermine their efforts and send ESTA staff on increasingly bizarre search projects for these mythical documents just to satisfy their political agenda. The opposition, as I said, is looking for evidence that we have not supported ESTA in these reports that may not relate to any call-taking or dispatch services or anything like that. Our record stands for itself. We are supporting them—we have supported them and we are supporting them—and having ESTA workers trawl through reports to try and prove that we are not supporting them is just farcical. But, again, it is what we have come to expect from those opposite.

As I said, ESTA has and is experiencing significant demand, and we have acknowledged that, whether it be the thunderstorm asthma event in 2016 or whether it be the pandemic. No-one is denying that, and we have been up-front about that. The minister has answered questions repeatedly in this chamber about that, and we are doing all that we can to support the workforce and will continue to do that. We will continue to give them the resources that they need to do the important work that they do. Additional resourcing and support has been made available to them, and we will continue to do that.

Earlier this month the government announced \$115.6 million to immediately improve service delivery and support staff at ESTA. This record package will fund more than 50 new ambulance call takers and dispatchers. A comprehensive recruitment campaign is already underway to fill the new positions to build a bigger workforce to draw on during peak demand times, to train other call takers and to better deal with, support and manage teams. All the new positions will progressively come online by mid-2023. This extra capacity will mean more consistent and stable numbers of call takers rostered on each day, and more workers will draw on the overtime and extra shifts to meet higher call volumes. So we are supporting them and we are giving them additional resources. That new funding is on top of the \$27.5 million package in October 2021 which has meant flexible rostering to support peak times, money to train more call takers and support staff, facility improvements and operational initiatives. The last budget also funded an extra 43 FTE positions, all of which are now operational and helping answer more calls, more quickly. So those opposite can sit there and talk about how nothing is happening and nothing is being done, but it could not be any further from the truth.

So as I said earlier, another Wednesday, another documents motion, another political agenda, more misinformation and more politicking. I am sure there will be lots more social media posts that will flow from today's debate as well. It is pretty much all they have got left. They come in here, they move a motion, they misquote comments that are made and answers that are given and furthermore they ask a question in question time, that question is answered and they then put up a tweet which does not reflect the answer that has actually been given. It is misquoted, and then they basically pat themselves on the back and say, 'Woo hoo, what a win today, look at us. We're fantastic!'. All they are doing is talking to themselves and patting themselves on the back. They are irrelevant. No one is listening to them except for themselves, and we will see how that works out for them. You continue talking to

yourself, because no-one else is listening. Continue being irrelevant and we will treat this motion like we do all the motions you bring on a Wednesday: with the contempt that it deserves.

Mr BOURMAN (Eastern Victoria) (11:04): I rise to speak in support of this motion. I note that it is asking for the documentation regarding, basically, the result of what has happened with the \$15 million spent in consultancies listed in its annual reports, and they want to see some of the reports, which is a fair call. I made no secret of the fact that I actually worked for the predecessor to ESTA, and I think a few people have made this next point clear, but I want to make sure that we are 100 per cent clear on it: the people that work at ESTA are not the issue here. The people that take the calls, the people that dispatch the cars or the trucks or whatever it might be are not the issue.

The issue here is there is a problem. The issue here is that the problem is costing lives. It is good to see that the government is actually working on it, but I think one of the things that I am taking out of this whole thing is that in the long term I see this happening in various instances: we wait till there is a problem before we fix it. Governments really do not like spending money on these sorts of things, but I think it is a precaution against this sort of issue arising. The pandemic was very difficult to predict, obviously—impossible to predict. But the fact that the numbers of people in the emergency services really are not keeping pace with the growth of society and the fact there is no surge capacity—the surge capacity for any of the emergency services is basically zero—when something big happens, something gives. Something has to give. There is enough generally to do the job at the moment and nothing else.

The pandemic, when it started—I remember it fairly clearly—was more a scare than anything, because we saw what was happening in the rest of the world. We took precautions, and we did all sorts of things. But as time went on people got—well, I will not say ‘into the swing’, because having the whole state locked down is hardly something that you get into the swing of—used to it and operated with it. Then we had the problem that people were worried. They would make a call to 000, and then things started to take time. There was that little bit of capacity, and then as things went on it got worse and worse. I have noticed it has actually hit its peak as we are coming out of the pandemic problems. I am finding the issue is that now, when we have had time to deal with it, we are stuck with it, and we are stuck with people not being able to get through. We are stuck with people driving themselves to hospital or whatever the case may be.

Having been in an emergency service I know there are times when this just cannot be predicted, but I think it is a fair and reasonable thing for this chamber to see what reports have been delivered to be able to at least give the public confidence. There is lots of talk in here about what they are spending, but the public needs confidence that there is something this is based on. These reports will be interim reports or draft reports. I guess to a degree there needs to be a bit of latitude given to this because some of the reports will not be in a position or in a fit state to be presented to the Parliament, let alone the public, but I think for peace of mind for everyone we need to see something. It is clear that money needs to be spent. The government is spending money, but we also need to see the nuts and bolts behind this issue. And I think we need to see that ESTA, the authority, is being given the tools, the money and the manpower—person power or whatever we call it these days—or staffing to deal with this issue into the future, because it is pointless just glossing over this for now. It is pointless just saying, ‘Oh, well, we’ve got this problem now; we’ll fix it now’. Let us hope there is not a next pandemic, but the next time there is a problem we do not want there to be a problem. We want enough to have been done between now and then.

So these documents—and \$15 million is not an inconsequential amount—I think are quite important. I will be very interested to see what does get released, and I look forward to the response from the government. With that, I commend this motion to the house.

Dr CUMMING (Western Metropolitan) (11:09): I rise to speak today on the opposition’s motion calling for documents for the Emergency Services Telecommunications Authority, which is ESTA, so the community can have the \$15 million of consultants’ reports listed and their annual reports since

2014. I cannot believe the government have come in here and believe that this is some kind of social media exercise instead of understanding that the community want transparency. They want accountability, and they believe that there should have been an inquiry over the last two years into the COVID response so we could have learned from it. But this government has chosen not to be transparent, not to produce the health advice and not to show anything to the community so they can have a level of understanding as to why the Premier and the Minister for Health have come out with the directions and the mandates and why our hospital system is the way it is. I was in question time yesterday hearing this government continue to try to deflect from their own inability to actually make sure that we were ready for this pandemic. Jenny Mikakos clearly at the start of the pandemic wanted to do that, and unfortunately she never got the opportunity.

For me, this government has continued to run an extreme fear campaign with masks. I produced documents here in August 2020 to say that the only mask for this virus was the N95 mask, but this government continued down the path of having cloth masks, having surgical masks worn, to this day, by our schoolchildren, with no scientific evidence for that to continue on and to occur. In this place they have mentioned, 'Oh, well, 100 years ago there was the Spanish flu'. Well, 100 years ago, government, there was not the science around the N95 mask.

I have continued in this place to try to make sure to keep this government accountable, wanting them to be transparent. For me, I cannot for the life of me understand why they have continued on with their mandates, why they have continued on with their fear messaging—and they are here wondering why calls to 000 are not being answered and ambulances are taking hours to actually attend and about the amount of code reds we have seen. They do not realise the fear and the mental health of our community, the amount of calls that have been made by teenagers, by children, calling 000 because of their own mental health, by other people within the community calling because of the fear that this government has put them under with the continuation of their lockdowns, which were unnecessary, locking up healthy people. They are oblivious—oblivious—to their impact on the mental health of Victorians and wondering to this day why people are calling up 000, not really understanding why they should have been calling when they have COVID and what was going on. This government never handed out, like other jurisdictions around the world, COVID-ready kits. Brazil and other Third World countries were giving out COVID-ready kits for people when they had COVID at home, knowing exactly how to deal with it.

Let us talk about this government and what they have said on social media. Of course this government's social media, when just last week ministers and the Premier had COVID, as well as the federal ALP, just showed a little box: 'I'm at home, and here's my Panadol'. Really? That is your COVID-ready kit? In this place in 2020 I was requesting that, before there was a vaccine, from what the science was showing us and how they were treating it overseas, we be prepared. Our community could have absolutely gone in with confidence, when they had COVID, about what to do. But no, we had to continue with some communications and media rubbish and the contempt with which this government has actually treated the community.

Let us go on about also the 000 calls about vaccine injuries. In this place no-one in the government wishes to recognise the vaccine injuries that have occurred, the vaccine injuries in the way of calls to 000, and the stigma that they have created. Even the people who are out there and suffering vaccine injuries so that they cannot work—this government makes them feel bad that they cannot even get the help that they need.

Let us talk about the elective surgery that this government chose to stop throughout all of the lockdowns that were not needed, all of the elective surgery and all of the diagnostic medical care that should have been continued and been available when there was little, if not no, COVID within the community. We had surgeries everywhere and doctors sitting at home and dentists sitting at home—appalling, extremely appalling.

So I do support today this motion to actually have all of those reports for the community and others to read. And to actually hear from this government, ‘Oh, this is actually drawing people away’—excuse me; they are already written. You cannot get your hands on them? They should be just readily available. It should be the most easy thing to do today to produce all of this and to hand it over to the community—to this Parliament so we can actually see what needs to be fixed.

I commend the opposition for bringing this up. I commend at any time anyone here on the crossbench or the opposition who wants transparency, wants accountability or wants an inquiry, because this is what the community wants. This is what my constituents want. Allow them to have all of the information at their hands so they can make their own health decisions and we can actually fix what is broken rather than you continually sweeping it under the carpet and pretending that it is not happening, because on the ground I can assure you my community are sick of calling up 000 and not getting the responses that they require.

We are talking about ambulances, but there are also police responses in the last two years—and even to this day people who are wanting urgent police attention are not getting it. For me, hearing from my community that due to the lack of police confidence they are telling people when they call up 000 to ask for the fire brigade is appalling—that this government has allowed all of the good years of our police force and the community goodwill to be eroded in such a small amount of time with this government’s absolute fear campaign around masks, absolute fear campaign about fining people and saying that they cannot operate, that they cannot gather when they are healthy. Shame on you—and produce these documents.

Motion agreed to.

Motions

RUSSIA-UKRAINE WAR

Mr ATKINSON (Eastern Metropolitan) (11:18): I do not intend to talk very long on this at all, because I really want this to go to a vote. I think the expression of the house by way of a vote is actually more significant today than the debate itself, because I think we are all on the same page in terms of the importance of this motion in expressing an opinion on the Russian invasion of Ukraine. I formally move the motion standing in my name:

That this house:

- (1) deplores the unprovoked Russian invasion of the sovereign territory of Ukraine;
- (2) expresses:
 - (a) solidarity with the people of Ukraine and praises their courage in defence of their sovereign nation and democratic values;
 - (b) its shared distress with and support for the Ukrainian community in Victoria as Ukraine fights to remain an independent democratic nation;
 - (c) its gratitude to the countries providing humanitarian aid and support for refugees and the Ukrainians defending their nation;
 - (d) solidarity and support for the Russian citizens risking their safety and freedom in peace protests in Russia;
- (3) condemns:
 - (a) the atrocities and war crimes especially those committed on civilians and children by Russian armed forces at the direction of President Putin;
 - (b) the unconscionable threats made by President Putin involving an escalation in the war against Ukraine and other nations; and
- (4) calls for an immediate cessation of hostilities and the unconditional withdrawal of Russian armed forces.

This is a motion that deplores the invasion. It is a motion that expresses solidarity and support for the Ukrainian people. It acknowledges the work that is being done in humanitarian aid and support by

many other countries, particularly bordering Ukraine and working to assist refugees and obviously to provide aid to those people who remain in Ukraine.

It acknowledges the fact that many Russians, those that actually have had the opportunity to know about the motives and the actions of President Putin, have actually stood against this particular invasion and in many cases cannot understand why they are fighting their brothers in Ukraine—people with whom they have shared significant history. It acknowledges that some of those people have put themselves at risk of penalty from Putin's Russian government because they have stood in support of Ukraine and attended peace rallies. It acknowledges our support for the local Ukrainian community and recognises how they also are suffering at this time, particularly as they have friends and relatives who are caught up in the war, many of them innocent civilians, women, children—people who would never have expected in this century to be facing this sort of upheaval, this sort of tragedy that is the Ukraine war.

It also recognises, very importantly I think, the need for all of us to express an opinion on this particular conflict. Throughout my period in Parliament I have never put motions up regarding international affairs because I believe that for the most part they are legitimately under the jurisdiction of the federal government. On this occasion I was so moved by what we see playing out in Ukraine, by the atrocities and the war crimes that are being committed by Russian forces in Ukraine, that I thought this time I would move away from what has been my view of international affairs in this place, and thought it was important for me and I would hope this house to express an opinion on this conflict and to deplore the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Dr CUMMING (Western Metropolitan) (11:23): I rise today to speak on Mr Atkinson's motion, and I do wish to send my heartfelt sadness at what is playing out in Ukraine at the moment, but also to express my heartfelt wish for peace for our Russian community as well as our Ukrainian community here in Victoria and in Australia, knowing that when a government calls a war there are many innocent people who do not necessarily believe in their government's push and believe that there are other ways—other peaceful ways—to be able to resolve conflicts and problems. I commend Mr Atkinson's motion, understanding that this is normally not what we would do in this place as a state parliament, but for me I just want to I guess from my heart say that there are many Russians here in the community who are completely sad at what they are seeing and Ukrainians who are completely sad at what they are seeing as well as the broader community, because here in Australia we are known with our defence forces to be peacekeepers. One of the wonderful things about our Australian Army and our defence forces is that we have spent many, many decades trying to keep peace around the world, so I thank Mr Atkinson for bringing this up today.

Ms TAYLOR (Southern Metropolitan) (11:25): On Monday, 4 April 2022 the Premier met with Mr Stefan Romaniw OAM, co-chair of the Australian Federation of Ukrainian Organisations, the AFUO, to discuss the terrible situation unfolding in Ukraine. The Premier and Mr Romaniw discussed many things, including the Victorian government's \$175 000 contribution to the Association of Ukrainians in Victoria. The funds will support Ukrainians arriving in Victoria from the conflict and also casework and referral services on behalf of Victorians with family in Ukraine, including international tracing of family members who have become separated. This support will complement Victoria's other support for Ukraine, including an offer to the commonwealth to accommodate recently arrived refugees at Mickleham and our lighting up of public buildings blue and yellow on 24 February 2022. Our thoughts continue to be with the people of Ukraine as they bravely fight against unprovoked acts of aggression from the Russian Federation.

Mr MEDDICK (Western Victoria) (11:26): At the outset I want to thank Mr Atkinson for bringing this particular motion today. I do realise, as some have said, it perhaps strays outside the convention; however, I think it is vitally important that in this place we recognise the situation that is going on.

My father was somewhat of a conservative man but was also a British paracommando in the Second World War, and he was fond of a very Bolshevik saying: a gun is a weapon with a worker on both

ends. That is the case with what is happening in Ukraine at the moment. People, the general population, are being sacrificed at the whim of political gain, and that just should not ever be the case—ever. I take my hat off and I recognise all of those people who are fighting for their freedoms within Ukraine, the Ukrainian people. They have my sympathies. I have admiration for them in their defending their country. I have admiration for those who are working with all the animals that are being either abandoned or killed and who are trying to rescue them during the whole process. I also extend my sympathies towards those people in Russia who are demonstrating at their own peril against what they see as an injustice being committed by their own country. We need to recognise them as well.

My party is a party that represents, or tries to on every occasion represent, the moral of passive resistance. Where we see something wrong we try to change it through the political process. We never advocate violence in any form, and I uphold that premise in this place when I say my solidarity is with the Ukrainian people and with those in the Russian resistance. I support Mr Atkinson's motion.

Dr KIEU (South Eastern Metropolitan) (11:28): I rise to speak to the motion brought by Mr Atkinson. I have been self-restrained in not wandering too far outside our jurisdiction, but having lived through a war, having been a refugee myself and with a history of my motherland, Vietnam, being invaded I want to rise and express my total support for and solidarity with the people of Ukraine, who are fighting for their country, for their independence and for their democracy. I condemn the atrocities of war. Innocent civilians have been tortured, killed and raped and bodies left lying on the street and in mass unmarked graves as part of the destruction of the country and people's lives. So I just want to express my support for and solidarity with the Ukrainian people and in general to support the fight of the people for their independence, for their country and for their democracy.

Mr DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan—Leader of the Opposition) (11:30): I thank Mr Atkinson for bringing this motion to the chamber. It is a very important motion. It is critical that our chamber takes a clear set of positions on these matters. We have all been shocked by what we are seeing on our television screens, and I think that this is a motion that actually encompasses the views of everyone in this chamber. That is a rare thing, but it is actually reflective of what in fact we have seen. On our screens we have seen really a tyrannical Russian president push in such a way that the community have been shocked by what they have seen—the images on our screens of families, the images on our screens of buildings, the terrible human rights stories that are starting to come forward—and I think this is why it is important that we as a community, but in this case our house, literally, as Mr Atkinson said, deplore the unprovoked invasion, express solidarity with the people of Ukraine and, importantly, note the humanitarian and other support that has been provided. I make the point here that it is beyond humanitarian support, and in this case that is entirely appropriate.

I do take up Mr Atkinson's point about the solidarity and support for Russian citizens who have risked their safety and freedom in peace protests in Russia. I think we can very strongly make that point, and I do implore the Russian authorities to look for ways to find a peaceful solution to this. There must be a way forward there. There are parties in the world that would act as neutral negotiators in this matter. Whatever grievances Russia may believe it has, these could be dealt with in a better way. It is instructive that after so long in Europe without full-scale war we are seeing what is in fact a full-scale war, and I think that the community here has been shocked by that. The European community has been shocked by that.

The issues that are there in terms of energy supply will have to be confronted. In a realpolitik way there were warnings about excessive dependence on Russian energy supplies, and it is unfortunate that they were not heeded. I think it is unfortunate, and the European nations are now having to confront that difficult reality that they have got a significant dependency. That is going to have to be dealt with, and there may be an opportunity for Australia to play a part in assisting with that.

I do put on record that I think the Australian authorities and Prime Minister Morrison and Foreign Minister Payne have been exemplary in their approach on this matter, and I do think it is important to put that on the record too. As a country we have done very well in putting the case that is now broadly

accepted across the world—and not just the Western world but the broader international community. I do say that there is a role for us speaking to people that we encounter too. All of us encounter people from other international communities in the various forums that we move around in, and I think that we need to put the case for the Ukrainian people there. I know Matthew Guy obviously has a partially Ukrainian background and has a deep understanding of these issues and has family in Ukraine, so he has that deeper, I guess, understanding that you have when you have a personal link with a country in this way.

With those small words, I commend Mr Atkinson on bringing this motion to the chamber. I think it is important that it has been moved, and I thank the government for its support in enabling that to happen.

Mr ATKINSON (Eastern Metropolitan) (11:35): I thank speakers who have contributed to the debate on this motion. I think they do represent all of the members in this chamber, I am sure, in terms of the expressions that they have made. I particularly welcome Ms Taylor's remarks in respect of what the Victorian government has done so far to provide practical support in the context of supporting the people of Ukraine and recognising, as this motion does, the human tragedy of all of this conflict. We can only hope that it is resolved very quickly and peacefully. Of course the last paragraph of this particular motion does call for the cessation of the hostilities and the withdrawal of Russian armed forces from Ukraine. I think all of our thoughts and prayers are with the people of Ukraine at this time, and particularly those innocent people who have been caught up in a war that was unprovoked and that really defies comprehension for us in this 21st century. You would think that we would have learned the lessons of the past and the conflicts that have been before and that we would never again have gone to this sort of situation. We can only hope that it is resolved very quickly.

Motion agreed to.

Business of the house

NOTICES OF MOTION

Mr DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan—Leader of the Opposition) (11:37): I move:

That the consideration of notice of motion, general business, 737, be postponed until later this day.

Motion agreed to.

Motions

SEXUAL OFFENCE REPORTING

Mr GRIMLEY (Western Victoria) (11:37): I move:

That this house:

(1) notes that:

- (a) the Victorian Law Reform Commission's (VLRC) report *Improving the Justice System Response to Sexual Offences* found that approximately 87 per cent of people who experience sexual violence do not report it to the police;
- (b) the VLRC report found reasons sexual assault victim-survivors do not report to police include wanting to explore restorative justice processes, negative perceptions of police or thinking their sexual assault is not serious enough to warrant a police report;
- (c) a sexual assault reporting option (SARO) is an alternative reporting mechanism that allows victim-survivors to report a range of sexual crimes to designated agencies and receive appropriate support;
- (d) the South Eastern Centre Against Sexual Assault ran the Sexual Assault Report Anonymously service in Victoria until 2020 where it received 1200 reports each year;
- (e) in addition to other jurisdictions, NSW's SARO has successfully led to prosecutions on crimes such as sexual assaults and drink spiking; however, the NSW model is not deemed best practice and improvements should be made when adopting the system in Victoria;
- (f) a SARO was recommended by the VLRC report;

MOTIONS

Wednesday, 6 April 2022

Legislative Council

1197

- (2) calls on the government to:
 - (a) commit to implementing a SARO;
 - (b) begin an Engage Victoria consultation and round table with stakeholders to develop a best practice SARO model; and
- (3) requires the government to table a report on the findings of the Engage Victoria consultation outlined in paragraph (2)(b) in the Legislative Council by 1 September 2022.

I rise to speak on my motion 752 about sexual assault alternative reporting options. Just before I start my contribution, I will be using the acronym ARO, alternative reporting option, not to be confused with the New South Wales SARO, which has had extensive media coverage and which is not necessarily best practice.

There are many reasons why victims choose not to report a sexual assault against them. These can include ‘I didn’t think it was serious enough to report’, ‘I didn’t want the perpetrator to go to jail or to know that I’d made a police complaint’, ‘I’ve had bad relationships with the police in the past, so I wasn’t too keen on talking to them’, ‘This is just the industry I’m in; it always happens’ and ‘I didn’t know where to go to report this’. Unfortunately there are plenty more reasons. It is not for us to judge why someone does or does not report, but we do have an obligation to make sure that they have an accessible alternative option to tell someone or to report the abuse.

I have spoken in this place too many times to count about sexual assault and especially about the lack of reporting and the lack of data collection. It is simple: we do not have enough reliable data on how widespread this issue is. I will rattle off just two statistics today that will hopefully accentuate the problem of under-reporting. The 2016 personal safety survey found that 34 per cent of women who did not report their most recent incident of sexual assault by a male perpetrator to police said it was because they did not regard the incident as a serious offence. Plus the VLRC report *Improving the Justice System Response to Sexual Offences*, which recommended an ARO, states that at least 70 per cent of people who experience sexual violence do not report it to the police. In fact only about half even seek support from someone, usually from family or friends. This proposal has also been discussed and recommended by many stakeholders and the victim-survivor community for many years preceding the release of this report.

It was just this month that the major universities took part in the national student safety survey. It was once again damning. RMIT University found that:

More than 50% ... don’t know where to go to make a complaint about sexual harassment or sexual assault.

In this day and age I find this response incredibly alarming.

In response to a question without notice that I raised with the Attorney-General in late February, the government unfortunately remained noncommittal on the recommendation of an ARO. The motion I have introduced is very straightforward and is asking the government to do three things: firstly, commit to implementing an online alternative reporting mechanism for sexual assault; secondly, begin an Engage Victoria consultation process, including round tables with stakeholders, to develop an evidence-based reporting option for sexual assaults; and thirdly, to table a report on the findings of the Engage Victoria consultation in this place by 1 September 2022.

I expect the government may say to the house today that there could not be enough time or there may not be enough time to conduct the consultation, especially in the time frame specified in the motion. However, precedent has been set through other Engage Victoria processes that would allow this time line to be absolutely met. The property market review went for under two months. The review of Victoria’s approach to illicit tobacco regulation was open for 3½ months. The Aboriginal self-determination and education process had a time line of four months. And to demonstrate how quickly the government can act on certain issues, it was 26 November 2020 when former Attorney-General Jill Hennessy asked the Victorian Law Reform Commission to conduct the ‘grab and drag’ review, just eight days after the sentencing of Jackson Williams and on the day that the e-petition with over

100 000 signatures was presented to Parliament. We ask them to commit to the same urgency that we know they have committed to in the past. We think this time line is sound and achievable.

One victim who wanted to use only her first name—we will use a pseudonym and call her Ellie—was sexually assaulted by her friend's father when she was around 15 years old. Coincidentally I worked with Ellie on another matter when I was in the sexual offences and child abuse investigation team, so it is a bit of a full circle for me. I helped her in the court process, and now I am speaking about her in regard to implementing a law, which is quite surreal. But on the alternative reporting option, she said that she was fully supportive, saying:

... reporting online is less traumatic and allows your emotions to not come to the surface until [the person is] ready ... it allows control over my story.

This is what this motion is essentially all about. I have had plenty of other feedback from sexual assault survivors, both young and historical, including a very brave young lady, Mikaylah, who is here today and joined me this morning on the doorstep. I will not rehash what all of the victim-survivor comments are, because I do not think I need to convince anyone here that this is what victim-survivors want.

New South Wales have had a sexual assault reporting option since 2012. It was made more well known, though, as a result of the Chanel Contos advocacy and Operation Vest. Whilst this particular model of an online reporting option is not recognised as best practice, as some questions are not trauma informed, it has had incredible success since its implementation. Two examples that New South Wales police shared with my office about its benefits, besides the obvious general intelligence gathering, include: firstly, with a string of drink spikings reported through the SARO, New South Wales police were able to get their liquor licensing division to work with venues cited in the report, and they then were able to conduct training and provide information for managers and staff about how to spot and reduce sexual assaults and poor behaviour; secondly, in one case New South Wales police told us about, they had a survivor who had described her perpetrator in great detail and with a similar modus operandi to one in a court case that was being put together by more than a handful of other victims—long story short, with further investigation the victim was added to the court case, and they were able to get a prosecution, including for that victim's allegation. Whilst New South Wales police make it clear that the SARO is not about prosecutions, this would have been an incredibly fantastic feeling for that victim to receive some form of justice. The New South Wales SARO is not best practice in its current form. For instance, you need to download and fill out a form, and some of the questions have been identified as slightly inappropriate by victims. However, New South Wales are currently undergoing a review of the way the SARO is set up and hope to have changes implemented this year.

Queensland have an alternative reporting option run by their police, which is a modern online form. There are also examples of alternative reporting in Western Australia, the ACT, South Australia and Tasmania as well as nationally and overseas.

We are not proposing a Derryn Hinch's Justice Party model of a SARO, as there are many issues that need to be fleshed out properly. This has become evident through extensive consultation by my office for this motion. We recognise that the ideal way to create a best practice ARO is to commit to adequate consultation and round tables with key organisations and victims of crime. Some of the issues we have identified through speaking with stakeholders are the following: firstly, who does the ARO sit with and who manages it? And also: how does mandatory reporting of children intersect with this platform? In New South Wales, for example, their SARO front page makes it clear that if the report is about children, the police must notify community services. Also, how does the issue of subpoenaed documents affect the alternative reporting options if at all? And how do we give victims agency through the ARO to control their story? These are some of the questions that we envisage the Engage Victoria process will address, asking stakeholders.

In drawing up this motion we have conducted extensive discussions with relevant and key organisations and people. These include: Victoria Police, including Wendy Steendam, deputy commissioner, family violence and sexual assault; Lauren Callaway, assistant commissioner, family

violence, sexual assault and child abuse; and Juliann Goldrick, detective inspector, stranger-based violence. They include academics such as Patrick Tidmarsh, who trains police in sexual abuse investigations; Georgina Heydon, who is here with us also today, present in the gallery; and Sophie Hindes from RMIT University. Thank you very much for your feedback. They are currently investigating best practice for alternative reporting options. They include victim-survivors, both in younger and historic child sexual assault demographics. Thanks once again to Mikaylah, a very brave young woman. They include various agencies, such as: Sexual Assault Service Victoria; the Sexual Assault and Family Violence Centre, with a letter of support from their CEO, Helen Bolton; and, of course, Child Safe Strategies CEO Debbie Boyse, who is also here today in the gallery. Thank you for your support. Many others have been invited to take part in this consultation.

The victims of crime commissioner also in her submission stated in relation to the SARO:

Given the individual and structural barriers faced by some victims of crime to reporting a crime, anonymous and confidential reporting options should be available as part of a suite of options for victims of sexual assault so that victims can engage with the justice system in a way that best meets their safety and justice needs.

That is just a classic example of how much we need this alternative reporting option, sooner rather than later.

In conclusion, I do not think that this motion is controversial in any respect. I think that we as policymakers do have an obligation to support victim-survivors of sexual assault, and this is one way that we can absolutely do that. Rather than just speak about it, we can actually do something. I will conclude by quoting the Attorney-General, who said in response to a question I asked earlier this year:

We—

the government—

want to have a state where those that experience sexual offending can come forward and report those crimes ...

I absolutely agree with this statement. Therefore I do not see what is holding up the consultation and implementation of an alternative reporting option. We need to stop sitting on our hands and show that we stand with the victims of crime and just get this done. I commend this motion to the house

Ms SHING (Eastern Victoria) (11:48): Thanks, Mr Grimley, for bringing this motion to the house today and for continuing a discussion which I know you have argued for, advocated for and been in this place for since you were elected.

I want to begin by acknowledging the enormous level of courage and bravery that it takes to be part of this really public discussion on really private, confronting and traumatic issues. I particularly want to acknowledge the victim-survivors who have been part of telling the story of what is their own experience—what are your own experiences—in trying to confront deficiencies in the system, which have in too many instances compounded the discrepancy in power that exists in situations of sexual violence; the gendered nature of what it is that women are confronted with and by in instances of sexual violence; the way in which this sits alongside matters associated with consent and with financial, sexual, social and health-based independence and freedom; and the importance of understanding that we as governments need to do better.

Now, against the backdrop of that starting point, I want to turn to a number of the things that Mr Grimley has addressed in his motion which I think are of enormous significance in outlining the principles that are important as part of overall system and policy reform. The Victorian Law Reform Commission (VLRC), as Mr Grimley has noted, has been part of the way in which this issue has been explored in some considerable detail, and I just want to put on the record the interrelationship between this work, the Royal Commission into Family Violence and the work we are doing on consent reform, and I note that today is the commencement of these changes, this reform to the way in which stalking laws and other matters associated with family violence can and indeed should be investigated and

prosecuted to the benefit of victim-survivors. This is a conversation about changing the dynamic to provide victims and survivors with a better level of autonomy and of dignity in the way in which courts, governments, law enforcement agencies and bodies and the community in general respond to these issues of extreme injury, hurt, distress and trauma.

We have seen an exponential increase in the way in which sexual assault and sexual violence matters are reported or disclosed, but what we also know is that there are significant barriers to reporting and to disclosure that continue to serve as an enormous barrier, often an insurmountable barrier, to having a conversation with authorities. These reasons range from a concern, often really embedded, that victim-survivors will not be believed—a perception based all too often in reality that in order to have a story understood it will need to be told over and over and over again, thus compounding the trauma that is already there, exposing further the shame and the humiliation that sits all too often at the heart of matters like this; the lack of support services to wrap around victims and survivors; and the anticipation of a journey that will need to be walked alone without necessarily an understanding of how the system works, which is a significant disincentive.

We have seen this spike in matters, as I referred to earlier, in reporting, but it is about making sure that in responding to those themes that have been identified by the VLRC, by the reports and inquiries—including, as I said earlier, the family violence royal commission, as well as the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System, as well as the changes that we are making to consent—and in the course of consultation we are making sure that we are directing additional resources to where they can do the best work, the most effective work and the work which goes to the heart of the policy challenges: the shortcomings and the need for reform and improvement.

The issues that Mr Grimley has raised relating to online reporting and to the important option for addressing high levels of under-reporting of sexual offences are matters that the Victorian government, as the Attorney-General has indicated in this place and in response to questions from Mr Grimley previously, is stepping through in consultation and in discussion with key stakeholders. I know that it is not fast enough for those people who have been part of the system, not through their own choice or design but because of the circumstances in which they have been victims and survivors or family and support and carers for those who have been victims and survivors. It is really important that as we engage with the VLRC findings and with stakeholders associated with this process we are doing so thoroughly and carefully so that we do not then have to come back and retrofit improvements into the system down the track.

This again may seem painfully slow, may seem hopelessly inadequate, but it is another step, I think, in a direction which will ultimately take us to a better system and a system which in fact continues to engage with people on the terms that are best for them, as people within the system find themselves all too often without access to information that they need, all too often without access to referral pathways which are right for them and all too often without the care and assistance that they need to in fact process, through the administration of justice or through other channels, the trauma, the distress and the injury that they have faced.

One of the things that is also important in the context of the response that government is part of considering and then indeed implementing is the complexity of these issues. Every instance of sexual assault and violence has key themes in relation to the exploitation of the victim-survivor, the way in which systems are used to the benefit of the perpetrator in too many instances and the way in which victim-survivors are left without the necessary recourse or support other than through ad hoc or indeed organically developed systems of support, often within community and often as part of word of mouth or indeed as people coming together, for example, in online forums, to discuss what they have been through, what it is that they need and what it is that is missing.

There are also really serious barriers to specific cohorts within our communities across the state, and this is something which has been noted across a range of different jurisdictions: that specific vulnerabilities require specific solutions tailored to understanding and addressing need. This includes

people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, people from our First Nations communities, members of our LGBTIQ+ communities, the very young and the very old—and again these are similarities which exist across a range of different inquiries and commissions that we have undertaken and that are being undertaken at a federal level as well. The Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety, the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability, the Royal Commission into Family Violence, the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System—these are processes, again, which seem in too many instances to be cumbersome and to be drawn out, but they are fundamentally about reforming systems which for too long have let down victims and survivors and for too long have failed to actually accommodate the specific needs of victims and survivors across a range of different circumstances.

We need to make sure that there is better trust in the system. The way in which we build that is through stakeholder engagement and consultation, through uncomfortable but necessary conversations and through the sorts of reforms which brought Mr Grimley here to this place and for which I commend him.

Ms BURNETT-WAKE (Eastern Victoria) (11:58): I rise to speak to the motion moved by Mr Grimley. The opposition have been pushing for an informal reporting option for victims of sexual assault for quite some time. To implement a flexible and informal reporting option for victim-survivors of sexual assault is in fact one of the policies of the Liberal-Nationals should we get into government, as announced in April last year.

For many women and girls, being a victim of sexual assault brings a lot of shame. The element of fear does not disappear after the assault itself. It lingers. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics 2016 survey, one in five Australian women and one in 20 men have experienced sexual assault since the age of 15. Most of these assaults occur in private spaces, behind closed doors, without witnesses. Not only does this make sexual assaults difficult to prosecute, but also it makes victims fearful of being believed. The figures reflect that almost nine in 10 women, 87 per cent, do not contact police after being sexually assaulted. Many are worried that their experience will not be taken seriously or that they will be labelled a liar.

Business interrupted pursuant to sessional orders.

Questions without notice and ministers statements

GOVERNMENT ADVERTISING

Mr DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan—Leader of the Opposition) (12:00): My question is for the Leader of the Government, and I refer to the Auditor-General's report on government advertising tabled today and the conclusion of the audit, which said:

In our opinion, the campaigns did not fully comply with the 2017 laws. Most OFS—

Our Fair Share—

... advertisements were political, in that they could easily be seen to:

- promote the current Victorian Government
- in the case of the OFS campaign, criticise the current Commonwealth Government ...

in the midst of an election campaign. And it went further:

Most OFS advertisements included statements that could easily be seen as criticising the Commonwealth Government's funding ...

and they go through a list of things. Minister, the auditor has blown the whistle on your partisan political advertising during the 2019 federal election campaign, making it clear that this was in effect a Labor Party advertising campaign, not proper government advertising, and I therefore ask— (*Time expired*)

Members interjecting.

The PRESIDENT: Order! Leader of the Government, have you heard the question? No, okay. Mr Davis, you know the rules. She did not hear the question. I did not hear it.

DUCK HUNTING

Mr MEDDICK (Western Victoria) (12:02): My question is for the Minister for Agriculture. Just three weeks ago the Premier said that anybody who is breaching bag limits or disregarding species will 'feel the full force of the law'. Already this season we have seen pits of buried birds, a sure sign that shooters have shot over their bag limit. We have seen many examples of protected species shot and killed—hardheads, blue-winged shovelers, freckled ducks and many other species of wetland birds. This past weekend we saw footage of a shooter at first attempting to hide a still living, illegally shot blue-winged shoveler in his large jacket pocket and then stomping the bird into the water and mud in an attempt to conceal his crime. Nobody has faced the full force of the law for these crimes. The Game Management Authority remains steadfastly disinterested in pursuing shooters. How much illegal activity must we tolerate before the government acts?

Ms TIERNEY (Western Victoria—Minister for Training and Skills, Minister for Higher Education) (12:03): I thank Mr Meddick for his question and his consistent and compassionate presentations of the issues that he brings to this house in this respect, and I will refer this matter to the Minister for Agriculture, consistent with the standing orders.

Mr MEDDICK (Western Victoria) (12:03): Thank you, Minister, for doing that. My supplementary is that rescuers have made reports of illegal behaviour on a number of occasions this season. Can the government provide an update on how many shooters have been charged?

Ms TIERNEY (Western Victoria—Minister for Training and Skills, Minister for Higher Education) (12:04): Again I thank Mr Meddick for his supplementary question, and that matter will also be referred to the Minister for Agriculture.

MINISTERS STATEMENTS: UNIVERSITY FUNDING

Ms TIERNEY (Western Victoria—Minister for Training and Skills, Minister for Higher Education) (12:04): Today I am proud to advise the house of the leadership taken by Victorian universities in research and development. This has been made possible by the Victorian Higher Education State Investment Fund. Today I announced \$17 million of funding to support 12 Victorian universities to expand significant research capabilities and facilities that will enable a strong post-COVID-19 recovery, generate new industry opportunities and jobs and support ongoing improvement of communities in Victoria and indeed the world. This government is facilitating strategic collaboration between universities and industry. 1200 students will have the opportunity to be part of groundbreaking research programs that will benefit all Victorians, especially those with health needs.

Victoria will now be home to one of Australia's most powerful microscopes. Monash University's transmission electron microscope will revolutionise medical research in cancer and infectious diseases, as well as vaccines and medical quality control. Victoria will also be home to the largest open-access clean room in the Southern Hemisphere. This is a brilliant collaboration between Melbourne, Monash, Deakin, La Trobe, RMIT and Swinburne universities and the CSIRO. Groundbreaking research will take place in the treatment of epilepsy and Parkinson's disease.

Medical research has been a priority of the Andrews Labor government's unprecedented funding of university research. This was our response to support universities during the COVID-19 pandemic. It reinforces this government's commitment to creating jobs and providing industry-linked training opportunities. We support university research that creates genuine collaboration—collaboration that is tangible, relevant and forward thinking. This is just another reason why we are the Education State.

VICTORIA POLICE LICENSING AND REGULATION DIVISION

Mr QUILTY (Northern Victoria) (12:06): My question is for the minister representing the Minister for Police. Over the last few weeks I have asked questions about Victoria's police firearms database. The government tells me that the reason the licensing and regulation division have lost track of over 100 000 firearms is that records were incomplete in 1996 when the new database system was implemented. This means that LRD's senior officers have not properly maintained their firearms database since 1996 and they have no idea how accurate it is. Surely this has been a failure of leadership. Previous firearms amnesties have not issued receipts for surrendered firearms, and dealers are now being pursued over not being able to produce firearms that were surrendered to police years ago. But Victoria Police are also a firearms dealer; they buy and sell firearms too. Why does the dealer get chased over a handful of firearms discrepancies when police can lose track of over 100 000 without consequences? Minister, do Victoria Police hold a firearms dealers licence, and do the same rules apply to them as apply to other firearms dealers?

Ms TIERNEY (Western Victoria—Minister for Training and Skills, Minister for Higher Education) (12:07): I thank the member for his question and indeed his consistency in providing a whole heap of allegations and then finally he getting to a question right at the end that is not necessarily connected to a conflated set of issues. Leaving that to one side, I will refer it to the Minister for Police for her response as per the standing orders.

Mr QUILTY (Northern Victoria) (12:07): Thank you, Minister. It is alarming that so many firearms were surrendered to police without records or receipts. Without amnesties, firearms would still be where records indicate; they would be in the hands of the owners in most cases. Now we have thousands of firearms that cannot be traced. We do not know where they went and will not be able to track them down. People gave their firearms to police in good faith, and the firearms have just disappeared. Were they destroyed, sold on the black market, kept by police? Because LRD officers have unaccountable access to firearms, we should also expect that they are subject to strict integrity measures to reduce the potential for corruption. IBAC argues that moving or rotating people, particularly in specialist squads such as drug squads, reduces the risk of corruption and misconduct by preventing stagnation and the development of inappropriate relationships. Minister, what is the tenure of senior officers in LRD? The rest of VicPol have a policy of limited tenure and rotation to combat corruption, but it appears that LRD is exempt.

Ms Pulford: On a point of order, President, by my count the member asked five questions in his supplementary. I would remind members of our standing orders and multiple rulings over the years from the Chair that it is one question plus one supplementary. I would encourage you, President, to perhaps pick one or remind members of that rule.

The PRESIDENT: Mr Quilty, you know the standing orders. I will ask you to rephrase your supplementary, please, with one question.

Mr QUILTY: Thank you, President. The actual question was quite clear. The rest was just build-up to it—the use of a question as a rhetorical device in building the case. The actual question was: Minister, what is the tenure of senior officers in LRD?

Ms TIERNEY (Western Victoria—Minister for Training and Skills, Minister for Higher Education) (12:10): I thank the member for his question. His explanation that his posturing, allegations and assertions are now a rhetorical frame is a very interesting proposition. Regardless of that, I will refer the supplementary to the Minister for Police.

COUNTRY FIRE AUTHORITY FUNDING

Ms BURNETT-WAKE (Eastern Victoria) (12:10): My question is to the Minister for Emergency Services. Minister, the CFA currently have headquarters in a building they do not own and in an area that is not a CFA response zone. The CFA also do not own the building they are housed in or the

building located next door. Considering this, Minister, why is the CFA currently using taxpayer funds for the construction of a walkway between the two buildings as well as the renovations to the building opposite? Is this an appropriate use of taxpayer funds that could instead be spent on the bare necessities that CFA volunteers are screaming out for?

Ms SYMES (Northern Victoria—Leader of the Government, Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (12:11): I thank Ms Burnett-Wake for her question. I will be happy to receive further advice in relation to the specific location that you are talking about, because it does not spring to mind as something that I have been briefed on to the extent of your question in relation to walkways et cetera. Having said that, I think it is an appropriate use of taxpayer funds to ensure that CFA volunteers have a home. Some of those arrangements may not be permanent, but I think indeed having somewhere for people to operate out of, to come together and to encourage new memberships is certainly something that I would support. If they are inadequate facilities, then that is something that we always strive to improve, and I am always happy to receive representations on these issues. In fact I do, so I would welcome them.

Ms BURNETT-WAKE (Eastern Victoria) (12:12): Minister, what do you say to the hardworking volunteers that are having to make repairs to their own clothing because there is no budget for more, whilst your government funds renovations to a building that adds nothing to Victoria's emergency services response?

Ms SYMES (Northern Victoria—Leader of the Government, Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (12:12): Whilst I welcome the inquiries, it would be much more appropriate if you were to provide me with a bit more detail, because in terms of the CFA we have just rolled out millions of dollars in new work wear. People are getting new uniforms. You are referring to repair of a uniform without any context, any detail. You have not even told me where you are talking about. If you really want an answer, if you really want action, provide me with the details, because it sounds like a pretty simple issue that I can ask the CFA to look into, give me advice on and hopefully fix. I just do not see what the purpose of your question is, because it is not really putting me in a position where I can give you a commitment to fix something when I cannot even understand what you are asking.

MINISTERS STATEMENTS: ELDERS CULTURAL WELLBEING PROJECT

Mr LEANE (Eastern Metropolitan—Minister for Local Government, Minister for Suburban Development, Minister for Veterans) (12:13): Last week I was fortunate enough to visit the Aboriginal Advancement League to meet with Dr Esme Bamblett and Aunty Doreen Lovett to chat about the elders in the community who have been brought together by the elders cultural wellbeing project. This project has been keeping Aboriginal elders connected and supported throughout the last few years. The project has provided invaluable insights into how they can continue to support Aboriginal communities and is proudly supported by the metropolitan partnerships.

The Aboriginal Advancement League has been providing services and advocacy for Aboriginal Victorian communities since 1957. The league is the delivery partner for the elders cultural wellbeing project under the Metropolitan Partnership Development Fund, which encompasses the metropolitan regions and has received funding from the government. Dr Bamblett said it is about connecting the community with exchange of ideas, stories and experiences. Dr Bamblett is a founding member of the northern metropolitan partnership and has volunteered valuable time and is dedicated to giving the northern suburbs a voice in government. I welcome that very much. The partnerships fund supports metropolitan partnerships to focus on local priorities, such as this project.

I would like to thank the following members of the partnerships: Diana David, inner metro; Deborah Mellett, southern metro; Karen Jackson, western metro; Gheran Steel, inner south-east metro; Michael Browne, eastern metro; of course ongoing member of the northern metropolitan partnership Dr Esme Bamblett; and all the metropolitan board members for their tireless work and for initiating this great program, which is making a huge difference to Aboriginal communities.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT FUNDING

Mr GRIMLEY (Western Victoria) (12:15): My question is for the Minister for Local Government. I have asked in this place before about a stabilisation fund and other ways to provide financial stability to smaller rural councils. The responses I have received talked about the rural councils transformation program, Sustainability Fund partnerships, spending allowances for smaller rural councils—which probably would not even in some cases fund one road project—and the library fund. Whilst these are great initiatives, they do not even touch the sides of the issue of long-term sustainability for councils. The rate caps only make their sustainability more doubtful. Whilst I can see the merits and necessity for rate caps, ratepayers still expect councils to deliver the same amount of services with a reduction in revenue. There remains the problem of the incredible disparity between rich, growing, financially prosperous metropolitan councils and councils in rural areas, which seem to receive the crumbs in terms of spending. I understand there is a rates bill coming to the house in a few months, but unfortunately it will not deal with this issue. My one, singular question is: Minister, can you explain why a stabilisation fund is not actively being explored for rural councils?

Mr LEANE (Eastern Metropolitan—Minister for Local Government, Minister for Suburban Development, Minister for Veterans) (12:16): I thank Mr Grimley for his question. I think as far as consideration about any particular fund goes, it is something that can be considered into the future. But I can say that one initiative that has recently been announced from the Treasurer is the opportunity for councils to access the treasury corporation loans, which has been advocated for by particularly peri-urban and rural councils for a number of years, and their aspiration for that has been fulfilled.

I understand that Mr Grimley is right in that the sustainability of small rural councils is an ongoing issue, and we continue to work with Rural Councils Victoria regarding what may be successful ways for rural councils to become sustainable into the future. I understand there are a number of issues that they have to deal with. And Mr Grimley is right; there are those issues in terms of geographically the size of their councils compared to metropolitan councils, the road networks and all the challenges that they have. I visited a rural council up at the top of the state a few months ago that have a number of renewable energy projects that they have lobbied for and that are being initiated in their particular local government area, which will bring in quite a fair bit of ongoing rate revenue, so there are a number of different initiatives that small rurals are enacting themselves.

I will just say to Mr Grimley, regarding any more suggestions around rural council sustainability, that we are always open to that. I think a couple of years ago we were all on a decentralisation program from the metropolitan areas to go out to rural Victoria, and I think the pandemic sorted that out for us and people are rushing out to those areas. So there will be an increased rate base, but I do respect that is a challenge within itself as well. So we would like to work with those small rural councils on turning that challenge into an opportunity.

Mr GRIMLEY (Western Victoria) (12:19): Thanks, Minister, fantastic answer. Clearly housing is an issue that would uplift the rate base of councils, and despite the future of the rate cap it would help the financial situation of rural and regional councils hugely. There are places in my electorate—as you would be well aware of, I am sure—that have seen an incredible demand for housing, like you mentioned with the displacement of those from metropolitan to regional areas. I have spoken about the low rental vacancies before around Western Victoria in particular. I have suggested a regional housing summit to gather ideas about how we can fix the housing crisis. Whilst housing is not necessarily in your portfolio, it is an issue that will directly go to the financial sustainability of councils. The Minister for Housing we have spoken to; he was receptive to the idea. But my question I suppose is: will you, Minister, speak with the Minister for Housing to progress the idea of a regional housing summit, given the benefits for local councils?

Mr LEANE (Eastern Metropolitan—Minister for Local Government, Minister for Suburban Development, Minister for Veterans) (12:19): I think the short answer is yes, because it is already coming to fruition and, given my regional colleagues here, Mr Grimley—you are hitting the nail on

the head—we have spoken about this issue in regional Victoria around housing, the lack of rentals, the cost of housing, Airbnb. There are a number of issues. It is an area that we really want to work with the rural councils on to find ways to support them, and I have actually said to them: any initiatives, any ideas, they want to bring to us will be really appreciated.

SUBURBAN RAIL LOOP

Mr DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan—Leader of the Opposition) (12:20): My question is to the Leader of the Government, the Attorney-General, and it concerns the practice of James MacKenzie, chair of the Suburban Rail Loop Authority and chair of Development Victoria, of using a private and distinct email server which is neither controlled nor accessed by government agencies he chairs. Cabinet documents are transmitted via these email addresses. Private communications concerning large government projects are transmitted via his private emails, and I therefore ask the Leader of the Government and Attorney-General: what steps will you take to ensure that the security and probity of government processes are protected with respect to any future criminal or civil legal processes and that evidentiary material is protected and courts would be able to access information on which government decisions were made?

Ms SYMES (Northern Victoria—Leader of the Government, Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (12:21): Mr Davis, again you just go on record and make statements and then say, ‘What do you say about it?’. It is not a matter for the Attorney-General to be giving comment on the accusations that you have made. I am not involved in the matter involving Mr MacKenzie at all, so you have put me in a very difficult position of being probably not—

Mr Davis interjected.

Ms SYMES: You cannot just make everything my responsibility by asking a question about it. That is not how it works. I cannot give you an answer, because you are not asking me a question that is appropriate for me to delve into the detail of.

Mr DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan—Leader of the Opposition) (12:22): That is a pathetic answer from the minister. But, Minister, corrupt activity is a risk where proper scrutiny is not in place. At the moment the freedom-of-information laws which you administer are being thwarted by Mr MacKenzie and government agencies consequent on his corrupt usage of his private email server, and I therefore ask: what action will you take to ensure—government, through guidelines—that private email servers are not used to hide corrupt deals, contracts and practices?

Members interjecting.

The PRESIDENT: Do you want the answer or not?

Ms SYMES (Northern Victoria—Leader of the Government, Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (12:23): It is very, very clear that Mr Davis does not care for my answer. I think some of the statements that you made are really inappropriate, and it goes to the motivation of your question. But in relation to it, in terms of the guidelines and the issues you have raised, I will take a look at it.

MINISTERS STATEMENTS: CONNECTING VICTORIA

Ms PULFORD (Western Victoria—Minister for Employment, Minister for Innovation, Medical Research and the Digital Economy, Minister for Small Business, Minister for Resources) (12:23): It is my pleasure to update the Parliament today on how we are improving connectivity to businesses in places across Victoria so that they can log on and participate more fully in the digital economy. In August 2021 I announced that up to 10 000 Victorian businesses across 12 locations would receive business fibre zone upgrades, allowing them to access faster and more reliable fibre internet through the enterprise ethernet services. These locations were Hamilton, Portland, Wonthaggi, Inverloch, Warragul, Colac, Benalla, Dromana, Pakenham North, Pakenham South, Lara and Cranbourne South.

I was pleased to add a further five locations to this list as part of our most recent Connecting Victoria broadband announcements. The new fibre zones will be in Alfredton, Buninyong, Loch Sport, Rockbank, Mount Cottrell and Tarneit. This will mean a further 2100 businesses will benefit from CBD pricing and CBD speeds for their business internet connections.

This is great news for businesses in my electorate, and I know that Buninyong local member Michaela Settle has been a particularly effective and vigorous advocate for improved connectivity for businesses in her electorate. Work is already underway to setting up these zones, with businesses being able to contact NBN Co and start the process of signing up from April. NBN will not charge installation or connection fees for business-grade broadband, thanks to our government's investment. Businesses only need to pay for their internet plan.

With improved internet, businesses can expand their markets by doing business online and use online tools to learn new skills, as well as having more flexibility in the way they work. We are helping to provide the infrastructure that our businesses need to truly excel in a digital economy. Better connectivity in Victoria is critical in creating more opportunities for jobs, stronger small and family businesses and keeping people connected.

ELECTIVE SURGERY

Mr HAYES (Southern Metropolitan) (12:25): My question is to the minister representing the Minister for Health. Whilst I applaud the government's promise to spend \$1.5 billion as a COVID catch-up package for elective surgery in Victoria, I have to wonder if that will even make a dint in the reported 81 000-plus elective surgery backlog, when 45 000 of these were from pre-pandemic lists and many have now been waiting for over three years for surgery. Two years ago the government said they were going to provide \$1.3 billion worth of funding and 4000 extra hospital beds by 2020, which have reportedly not been delivered. My question is: is the new \$1.5 billion promised in addition to the \$1.3 billion promised two years ago and not delivered, or is this to replace it?

Ms SYMES (Northern Victoria—Leader of the Government, Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (12:26): I thank Mr Hayes for his question and indeed his interest in the COVID catch-up plan, obviously a very important public policy and a great investment that is going to make a big difference. I am sure the Minister for Health will be delighted to provide you with further detail, and I will ensure that his response comes to you in a timely manner.

Mr HAYES (Southern Metropolitan) (12:26): Thank you, Minister. I look forward to the answer; it sounds great. The future of our health system looks gloomy. The president of the AMA has said that our hospital system has suffered from serious underinvestment and that deep cuts have been made to Victorian hospitals over recent decades that have clearly resulted in poorer patient outcomes. Victoria spends less money per person running public hospitals than any other state. With fewer beds, fewer staff and longer wait times in emergency departments, our emergency services remain overwhelmed. My question is: when will the minister acknowledge that by increasing the population of Melbourne without adding the essential infrastructure to support our community we will continue to have poorer patient outcomes?

Ms SYMES (Northern Victoria—Leader of the Government, Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (12:27): Thanks, Mr Hayes, for your supplementary question. I will pass that on to the minister, who will provide you with details, but I think there will be a bit of information about neglect from the federal government that accompanies that answer. But thank you for your interest. Indeed obviously public health is something that everybody in here has an interest in, so thank you.

PROBUILD

Mr DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan—Leader of the Opposition) (12:28): My question is to the Minister for Small Business, and I refer to the WBHOI Probuild collapse and the concerns previously expressed by all sides in this chamber with respect to creditors, including small businesses and

contractors, who have worked on the government's Big Build, specifically the western roads project. I note the deed of company arrangement says:

Upon effectuation of the DOCA all Creditors' claims against WBHOI will be extinguished and creditors will only have a right to an entitlement from the Creditors' Trust.

Major Road Projects Victoria and the state government have been silent on this, so my question to the minister is: given the DOCA effectively extinguishes outstanding liabilities of the western roads project, will the government step in and ensure that Victorian contractors are not left high and dry?

Ms PULFORD (Western Victoria—Minister for Employment, Minister for Innovation, Medical Research and the Digital Economy, Minister for Small Business, Minister for Resources) (12:29): Mr Davis used a few acronyms there, including at least one that I am not familiar with—

Mr Davis: The deed of arrangement.

Ms PULFORD: The deed of arrangement for the western roads upgrade project, was it?

Mr Davis: Yes.

Ms PULFORD: Yes, okay. I am happy to take that question on notice and seek a response from the Minister for Transport Infrastructure, but in doing so I would reiterate the comments that I have made, I think in the last two sitting weeks, around the work that government is doing with small businesses and contractors impacted by the situation with Probuild. Since the last sitting week, two weeks ago, I do not have a great deal further to update in terms of the work of the administrators in finding new opportunities for those works to be completed. But, again, all government projects are fully funded and we are confident that work will continue. In terms of the specifics around those contracting arrangements on that particular project, or suite of projects, through that tender, I will confer with my colleague and provide some further detail. We do continue to make sure that people are provided with support through the Workers in Transition program and Jobs Victoria.

Mr DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan—Leader of the Opposition) (12:30): None of those help these contractors; that is the problem. So I ask a further question: a PPP arrangement still exists for the management of the roads; is it the government's intention that small contractors yet to be paid by Probuild will not be compensated by the government or by the PPP?

Ms PULFORD (Western Victoria—Minister for Employment, Minister for Innovation, Medical Research and the Digital Economy, Minister for Small Business, Minister for Resources) (12:30): The supplementary question is certainly squarely in the responsibility of my colleague. I will seek a written response for Mr Davis on that question and those matters that relate to the administration of that contract.

Mr Davis: On a point of order, President, whilst the administration of those major projects is certainly the responsibility of the minister, the arrangements for small contractors and small businesses are squarely in the minister's portfolio responsibility.

Mr Gepp: On the point of order, President, there is no point of order. Mr Davis does this repeatedly.

The PRESIDENT: The minister has finished her answer, and I take the answer as completed. Or do you want to make any further comment?

Ms PULFORD: Yes, I might, because Mr Davis was doing that thing that he always does around trying to blur the lines around ministerial accountability, which actually is a very, very important foundation of systems of government in this country. That contract and that project are absolutely most definitely the responsibility of the Minister for Transport Infrastructure, and as I have said, I will take some advice from her about these questions. In terms of my responsibilities as Minister for Small Business and Minister for Employment, we have programs and initiatives that exist to support people

CONSTITUENCY QUESTIONS

Wednesday, 6 April 2022

Legislative Council

1209

who are impacted by this, and they are being deployed. Again, I would refer to the Leader of the Government's observations earlier in the house: it is time to go back to question time school, Mr Davis.

Mr Davis: On a point of order, President, it is clearly the point here that those contractors have not received the support they need, and that is the minister's response—

Members interjecting.

The PRESIDENT: Thank you! The question was put; the answer was given. No further.

WRITTEN RESPONSES

The PRESIDENT (12:33): Regarding questions and answers today: Mr Meddick to the Minister for Agriculture, Ms Tierney, two days, question and supplementary; Mr Quilty to police, Ms Tierney again, two days, question and supplementary; Ms Burnett-Wake to emergency, Ms Symes, one day for the question—

Ms Symes: Which one?

The PRESIDENT: The substantive question from Ms Burnett-Wake. You did not answer it. You said you would get back to her. That is what my understanding was.

Ms Symes interjected.

The PRESIDENT: All right. So it is clear, then: you will get more information to Ms Burnett-Wake. Mr Hayes to the Minister for Health, Mr Symes, two days, question and supplementary; and Mr Davis to Ms Pulford, the substantive question, one day.

Constituency questions

WESTERN METROPOLITAN REGION

Mr FINN (Western Metropolitan) (12:34): (1738) My constituency question is for the Minister for Health. Domestic violence is a dreadful blight on the western suburbs of Melbourne. Women and children are too often the victims of violence and abuse in a place where they should always feel safe, their own homes. Melbourne's six lockdowns over 2020 and 2021 have added to the domestic violence numbers significantly. In its previous incarnation as Women's Health West, GenWest helped victim-survivors of domestic violence in Melbourne's west for many years. The name change has not changed its role nor has it changed the desperate need GenWest has for greater support, particularly right now. In a recent meeting with the acting CEO of GenWest I heard exactly how dire the situation is. GenWest needs more help in order to meet the needs of an increasing number of people in the west. Minister, will you ensure the forthcoming budget adequately meets these needs?

NORTHERN VICTORIA REGION

Mr GEPP (Northern Victoria) (12:35): (1739) My constituency question is for the Minister for Housing, the Honourable Richard Wynne, and it relates to public and social housing. Minister, I have been contacted in the last couple of weeks by constituents in Northern Victoria who are public housing residents who want to know, given certain comments in recent weeks, what style, brand and cost range they should consider for their footwear in order to remain in public and social housing. The same applies to the type of mobile telephone that they own and whether or not the government believes it is appropriate for them to own either an iPhone or a Samsung which is not the latest model. Does the minister believe that should the wrong choice in footwear or telecommunications have already been made by these residents they will be kicked out onto the street because of it?

WESTERN VICTORIA REGION

Mr MEDDICK (Western Victoria) (12:36): (1740) My question is raised by the thousands of concerned citizens of the northern suburbs of Geelong, and they ask for the Minister for Planning to reject the proposal from Viva Energy to establish an LNG platform in Corio Bay just as he rejected a

similar proposal from AGL. This platform has all the same environmental concerns that halted AGL's application, but one other is also present here: should just one small failure occur in the engineered safety systems at the terminal or a single storage cell of a ship as it makes its way through the bay, the resultant explosion and fire will wipe out all the homes in a radius that stretches many kilometres from the point of origin, killing thousands of people. Such failures are not uncommon in this industry, and the results are always catastrophic. Will the minister listen to the residents of Geelong's north and dismiss the Viva application and in so doing protect the environment of the bay and the lives of those who call the area home?

NORTHERN METROPOLITAN REGION

Mr ONDARCHIE (Northern Metropolitan) (12:37): (1741) My constituency question is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. Kalkallo residents living in new estates in my electorate of Northern Metropolitan Region are concerned about the traffic and congestion and the need for a second exit out of the new estates, particularly Cloverton. I have raised this traffic issue in Kalkallo many times in this house and have got little response. You can imagine the frustration of the residents. Vix from Kalkallo wrote to me and said:

... residents of kalkallo are facing a big issue of traffic in the morning during school run nad while going to work, because of just 1 exit in the estate, people are stuck in the traffic and it take more than an hour to get ...

to work. I spoke to Ally yesterday about the Cloverton estate, who is just as frustrated. Widening the Hume Highway is not enough to get the queue of people out of the estates. My question for the minister is: will the government commit to a second entrance or exit in the upcoming state budget so my Kalkallo residents living in these new estates can spend less time in traffic and more time with their families?

WESTERN METROPOLITAN REGION

Dr CUMMING (Western Metropolitan) (12:38): (1742) My question is to the Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change in the other place, and it is from a resident, Greg from Maribyrnong. Will single-use plastic bottles, such as soft drink and water bottles, be included in either the banned single-use items or in the up-and-coming container deposit system? Greg walks around the Maribyrnong and Footscray area and notes that there is a large amount of these bottles which end up in the rivers, parks and garden areas. He stated that Victoria and Tasmania are the only states that do not recycle these items. While the government has announced a ban on all single-use plastics by 2023, including single-use plastic straws, cutlery, plates and drink stirrers, polystyrene food and drink containers and plastic cotton bud sticks, single-use drink bottles have not been listed as banned or included in the container deposit scheme.

EASTERN VICTORIA REGION

Mr BOURMAN (Eastern Victoria) (12:39): (1743) My question is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. The Easter break is approaching, and traffic will increase through Tynong, past Gumbuya World, with the risk of more serious crashes. The intersection at that stretch of Princes Highway has multiple speed limits and varying speeds and has cost too many Victorians their lives or resulted in serious injuries. I have previously brought this issue to the attention of the house, but I have yet to see any significant road safety upgrades or improvements or even interest in that dangerous stretch of the highway through Tynong. Will the government commit to making it a priority to make the Princes Highway in Tynong safer before we see more fatalities instead of just reducing the speed limit?

NORTHERN VICTORIA REGION

Mr QUILTY (Northern Victoria) (12:40): (1744) My constituency question is for the Minister for Health. I have met with several Northern Victoria constituents, parents concerned about their children's health: kids testing COVID negative on RATs but with the dreaded cold- and flu-like symptoms excluding them from receiving timely medical care. Exhibiting one or more generic

COVID symptoms means they cannot see a GP at their local clinic. Because they have a runny nose or a temperature, they are considered a risk; they cannot be seen. They are too sick to go to school yet not allowed to receive medical care. One parent resorted to taking their child to the local emergency department after a week of her child's non-COVID-related symptoms escalating. They found the child had an extreme ear infection that would have been treated earlier if they had been allowed to see their local GP. It seems to me that some of our youngest are physically suffering because of a fear of runny noses, itchy throats and temperatures. Minister, will you update the COVID guidance to allow northern Victorians, especially children, to be able to see their GP in a timely fashion?

NORTHERN VICTORIA REGION

Ms MAXWELL (Northern Victoria) (12:41): (1745) My constituency question is to the Minister for Health on behalf of the volunteers at Wangaratta Community Garden. The Wangaratta Community Garden was established in 1993, and it has relied on volunteers to bring together gardeners from diverse backgrounds of different abilities and ages who share an enjoyment of growing affordable and healthy produce. The evidence is growing that the relationship between gardening, mental health benefits and community resilience is strong. Wangaratta Community Garden has room to welcome more but desperately needs funding for a full-time gardener and manager. Mary Daly and Eric Bittner are Wangaratta Community Garden's coordinators. They are tireless, generous volunteers of their time and fierce advocates for the importance of community connectedness and personal wellbeing that come from the garden. However, the future of the garden cannot rely on volunteers alone. My question is: will the minister consider funding \$200 000 towards a garden manager and ensure that it can successfully continue to support the wellbeing of those people in Wangaratta who continue to utilise this market garden?

Mr Ondarchie: On a point of order, President, I draw your attention to standing order 8.08, specifically part (4), which indicates that answers to constituency questions must be provided to the Clerk within 14 days of them being asked. It says 'must', not 'may', not 'if you choose to', not 'if you can get around to it'—it says 'must'. I have a number of constituency questions that are outstanding: 1602, which is 56 days late; 1624, which is 44 days late; and 1666, which is 29 days late. These are questions all members ask on behalf of their constituents that are very important issues, and I think it is imperative that the government stick by the standing orders and respond within the 14 days.

Ms Pulford: On the point of order, President, let me undertake on behalf of the government to ascertain the status of outstanding responses and follow those up at the earliest opportunity. I thank Mr Ondarchie for raising this matter.

Motions

SEXUAL OFFENCE REPORTING

Debate resumed.

Ms BURNETT-WAKE (Eastern Victoria) (12:44): As I was saying before the break, 80 per cent of women do not contact police after being sexually assaulted, and many are worried that their experience will not be taken seriously or that they will be labelled a liar. They worry that they will face repercussions, and they worry that the justice system will not hold the perpetrator to account. There are many things that go through the minds of victims of sexual assault. If we had an easily accessible online reporting system, victims might feel more comfortable reporting what has happened to them. An alternative reporting option would allow victims to pull out their phones or laptops and make a complaint without the trauma of going to the police station to make a formal report.

As it stands Victoria is the only jurisdiction in the country without a structured formal reporting option for incidents of sexual assault. New South Wales has SARO, which is the sexual assault reporting option. This was a joint initiative of the New South Wales police and sexual consent advocate Chanel Contos. The New South Wales system is a webpage that encourages victim-survivors to make a formal report but also gives other options. It allows them to complete a sexual assault questionnaire where

they can easily handwrite or type their answers and mail or email it to the child abuse and sex crime squad at state crime command. They can choose to provide their details or report anonymously. Victim-survivors are reminded that this second option is not a formal complaint to police to initiate a criminal investigation; instead the information is gathered and may be used to help police develop strategies to target offenders, protect the community and reduce repeat offending. It may also be useful in prosecutions.

The details provided in the questionnaire are recorded on a secure and restricted New South Wales police database, and completed questionnaires are kept securely at the office of the child abuse and sex crime squad. The instructions are empathetic and are drafted in a way that lets those who access the website feel empowered. The wording acknowledges the difficulty in completing the report and the need to recall detail and recommends speaking to a counsellor or a trusted person for helpful strategies if the process becomes traumatic. If nothing comes of it, at the very least there is a record of what happened. It can be used for future investigations. The SARO initiative aims to empower victim-survivors to establish a record of what occurred, act as a therapeutic tool and increase police intelligence to better inform crime prevention strategies. It also allows more data to be collected on perpetrators committing these crimes, shows any patterns and highlights recidivist offenders.

It is not uncommon for victim-survivors to wait an extended period of time before reporting sexual assault. This is sadly often used against them in court. Defence counsel commonly ask, 'If this really happened, why did you wait so long to report it?'. If we had an easily accessible reporting system, one that did not involve going to a police station, people would have the opportunity to report details early. These early reports could be used as an effective piece of evidence in the future, no matter how many years passed before the victim-survivor was comfortable taking action.

Victoria of course did have a version of SARO. It was known as SARA, which stood for sexual assault report anonymously. It was set up after the devastating murder of a Victorian woman in 2012 after it came to light that other women had complained about the perpetrator via social media but no formal complaints had been made. This system was a great start, but it was unfortunately scrapped in 2020 due to insufficient funding at the hands of the Andrews Labor government. It is unfortunate that the system went to waste, particularly given that it is having an impact in New South Wales.

Informal reporting of sexual assault in New South Wales has risen 43 per cent since Operation Vest was launched in mid-March last year. Operation Vest was an introduction to SARO that aimed to empower people to speak up and make use of the platform. Since February last year sexual assault reporting in general has gone up by 54 per cent. There are some great lessons to learn from other models. The campaigning and the messaging around the reporting platform when it is introduced is key. We want to empower victim-survivors to make use of the platform and feel comfortable reporting their experiences. The New South Wales model is undergoing improvements, including modernising the system. I understand this is not a model system or best practice, and we should definitely not be looking to replicate it entirely; however, we need to look at other systems in place to learn from them and take the best practice elements.

There is no doubt this reporting system is wanted, but exactly how we go about creating the best system possible for the community to use is something we need to flesh out properly. There are so many questions. Who will be responsible for the site or application? How will it be resourced? What will the process be when a complaint is received? Can these documents be subpoenaed or used in court, and will this limit victim-survivors' use of the system? What is the process for police and following up these reports if the victim does not wish to take any action or is fearful? What about vexatious complaints? There are so many questions, but I am confident we can work together to come to a conclusion around how we can implement a system that would empower more people to come forward in a way they are comfortable with. The best way to flesh out these issues is to consult through an Engage Victoria consultation and round table where stakeholders can provide information that can be used to develop the evidence-based alternative reporting option that Victorians deserve. I commend this motion.

Mr GEPP (Northern Victoria) (12:50): I rise to speak on Mr Grimley's motion. Can I say from the outset that I thank Mr Grimley, Ms Maxwell, Ms Patten and others who constantly bring these things to the chamber, quite properly, so that we can have ongoing meaningful dialogue in such an important area of public policy, and I commend everybody who commits themselves to advancing these matters.

The Victorian Law Reform Commission has delivered, as has been noted by others, the *Improving the Justice System Responses to Sexual Offences* report. Amongst the many impressive findings and recommendations, the VLRC identified online reporting as an important option for addressing high levels of under-reporting of sexual offences, giving people more choice in how they report a sexual offence. The more choice that we provide, the better. We know that the under-reporting of sexual assault is prevalent. I think the very vast majority of sexual assaults go unreported or under-reported. Mr Grimley quoted a number—I think 87 per cent or in that space—in terms of under-reporting. So the more options that we provide for victims of sexual assault to report crimes against them, the better. The government is carefully considering all of the recommendations that were made by the VLRC in that report, some 91 recommendations. We remain committed to improving the experiences of sexual offence victims and survivors throughout the justice system.

Work is underway to improve the system, and we are committed, as I said, to doing so. We have already committed to some major reforms that will make it clear that there is no place for sexual violence in Victoria—and there is no place for it. There can never be any place for sexual violence. We have delivered some \$5.2 million in a funding boost to specialist sexual assault services to address what was an expected spike in referrals for services following the release of the VLRC report. I think that is the point that I was making at the top of my contribution: the importance of Mr Grimley and others continuing to shine a light on this very important area of public policy. What it does do is it does empower victims of these sorts of crimes to be able to come forward and the system to recognise those victim-survivors and provide the necessary support. The funding that we have provided through that \$5.2 million funding boost allows the hiring of extra staff to provide specialist support sessions to hundreds more victim-survivors.

We have also announced we are adopting a new affirmative model of consent in Victoria in line with the VLRC's recommendations, and work to develop this model is well underway. What we hope is that these changes, and this change in particular, will send a clear message that a person has a responsibility to say or do something to obtain consent prior to engaging in sexual activity with another person. It is most important that there is clarity at all times—that there is consent in those circumstances. There can never be grey area; there can never be any doubt. We must always ensure that there is clarity around that model of consent. Importantly it will also help, we say, to shift the focus away from the actions of the victim-survivor to those of the accused.

We will also amend laws explicitly criminalising stealthing, the removal of a condom or other protection during sex without the other person's knowledge or consent. This change makes it clear that this act is a violation of consent and is against the law. The VLRC made it especially clear that to address sexual violence, abuse and harm, piecemeal reform is not enough and delivering meaningful change requires reforms spanning primary prevention and community education initiatives, support for victim-survivors, perpetrator interventions through to criminal investigations and justice responses. The government remains committed to achieving these aims and is continuing to consult and develop the reforms to prevent and address sexual violence, abuse and harm that will capture the government's broad response to the VLRC's recommendations. We continue to engage with stakeholders on those reforms, particularly the ones proposed by the VLRC, including the critical reform for online reporting that I know is contained in Mr Grimley's motion, and we look forward to providing a report on those consultations as time goes on. The development of an online reporting mechanism will be an important part of our work to improve responses to and outcomes for victim-survivors.

Others have talked about specific concerns with Mr Grimley's motion, and specifically what the government would say is that if we were to act strictly in accordance with the motion that Mr Grimley has brought to the chamber it could well derail some of the work that is already underway. We know

that the VLRC's report is comprehensive and priorities within that report need to be carefully balanced. As I said a few moments ago, there are some 91 recommendations, and it is important that we carefully work through those to ensure that the most urgent areas of reform that are required are the ones that are enacted as quickly as we can possibly do so. Those things take time. They take work, but work is underway, and we will continue with those processes. Just as an example, the new alternative reporting mechanism that has been talked about cannot be rushed. It must consider both operational logistics and complexities as well as legal complexities. We are engaging very closely with stakeholders on those reforms proposed by the VLRC, including this critical reform for online reporting.

The call to begin an Engage Victoria consultation we say is unnecessary and could be problematic in repeating consultations that are already underway or have occurred and delaying any work on the reporting alternative as well as other reforms. We also respectfully say that the time frame that Mr Grimley proposes is also problematic in light of those existing processes and the design complexity that I talked about.

In the minute or so that I have left just prior to the lunch break can I just say that it is important that we acknowledge in this place that sexual violence is heavily under-reported. We know that. Probably only one in 10 incidents are ever reported, for a variety of reasons which I will not do the deep dive into. There are others far more qualified than I to speak on those matters. The under-reporting was very much acknowledged and highlighted by the VLRC, and they reminded us that even though sexual violence is widespread it is one of if not the most under-reported crimes in society. As I indicated earlier, I think Mr Grimley has mentioned a figure that in the order of 87 per cent of people who experience sexual violence do not report it to the police and only about half, if that, even seek support from anyone at all, including a friend or a family member. So we understand that reaching out to a support service and providing the options for victims of these heinous crimes is important. There is much more to be said. I know there are many speakers still to follow. With those remarks I will leave my contribution there.

Sitting suspended 1.00 pm until 2.03 pm.

Ms PATTEN (Northern Metropolitan) (14:03): I am very pleased to rise to speak to Mr Grimley's motion today. You know, it is frightening: 87 per cent of people who are sexually assaulted do not report that assault to the police, so something is terribly wrong about that process. I know this government is introducing some legislation around victims of crime compensation, but what we need to do is change some of the structure and some of the systems in place to make it easier for people to report those crimes. I think also fundamentally we need to be working further and further to prevent those crimes from occurring, and that requires really ground-up cultural change. We saw that in the Royal Commission into Family Violence, that often this is as basic as being around equality—around equality and a whole range of other issues that lead to violence against women. It is not only women who experience sexual violence, but it is mainly them.

As the motion states, the Victorian Law Reform Commission (VLRC) recently looked into sexual violence and reported late last year. It was a very expansive report and it made numerous recommendations, but principally it made it clear that the system needs to change so that when the system is in place it is straightforward and it is not traumatic for people who experience sexual violence. This we heard throughout our most recent inquiry into the criminal justice system—that the processes are not trauma informed and that the processes in our justice system can quite often further traumatise someone. Survivors of violence want to see the criminal justice system hold people responsible. The people who are responsible for that sexual violence must be held to account. But how they are held to account varies, so there have been lots of discussions even around restorative justice in this area. I know when we were doing Mr Grimley's inquiry into the management of child sex offender information a number of the victim-survivor organisations said, 'We just don't want the perpetrator to do it again; we just don't want it to happen again'.

Now, we need to look at why people do not report to the police. As I said, 87 per cent do not report to the police. People do not think that they will be believed, or they do not want to go through that criminal trial—and I totally understand that. We heard from people talking about their experiences in the court system, their experiences of having to come face to face with a perpetrator or, when they wrote victim impact statements, the fact that their perpetrator could actually amend those statements and could question what they were saying in their victim impact statements. There are lots of areas where we can reform this. I know the VLRC has made a significant number of recommendations, as did the Legal and Social Issues Committee's inquiry into Victoria's criminal justice system. We certainly looked at better ways to provide trauma-informed systems and to provide systems where victims can be heard and can feel like they have been heard.

I think we heard this time and time again—that the victim sometimes felt like a bystander in the case—and that is sort of how our system works. Quite often it is the public prosecutor that takes on prosecuting the case, and the victim becomes almost just a witness in their own experience of violence. I think we need to change this. We need to embed trauma-informed practices into the design of our justice system, and it needs to be more accessible, which means making it easier for people to come forward. And for many people it actually has to be less adversarial, because quite often it is that adversary that is absolutely frightening. It is a reason why people do not want to go through with the process—because the process is frightening. It feels like they are having to set themselves up for a battle.

I share Mr Grimley's concerns that we should have been working on this for decades. We have been tinkering around the edges, but we have not got there. And as I said right at the outset, change has to happen within the community. We have to understand that we do not accept any form of violence, but as I have also said, the system needs to change. The VLRC has made some really broad recommendations, but we need to understand sexual violence. We need to understand what it is and how it permeates some of our culture, and we need to support the people who experience it.

People still do not want to talk about it. We have seen Grace Tame and we have seen some other really brave women starting to stand up and talk about the sexual violence that they have experienced in different areas. But it is still difficult, and I would suggest that probably the majority of women who have experienced sexual violence have not stood up publicly and talked about it. Many of them may not have told a single soul about it or maybe told just their closest friend or their family. We need to find the tools and we need to find the ways to enable people to talk about sexual violence and to be able to report it. There are many barriers, and I think the VLRC report goes into this.

We also need to talk about public education. Stopping sexual violence should be everyone's business. Organisations like clubs and schools and employers should have stronger obligations to do what they can to eliminate sexual violence and harassment. I would like to do a shout-out to the Fitzroy Football Club. They have been doing some extraordinary work around addressing sexual violence. They have been working with their men's teams and their women's teams. They have been bringing professionals in there to have some really hard conversations with club members, and from all accounts it has been incredibly positive for not only the women in that club but also the men.

But the system for responding to sexual violence is under strain. We have heard that victim support services, police and lawyers are all overworked and under-resourced, so getting assistance and finding an intermediary to help you in the court system quite often is not possible because they just do not exist, particularly if you are in regional areas. So we need to create a system that is straightforward and effective. I can see that the government is doing this, but there is a lot more to be done. The VLRC has said this needs to be across government; it cannot just be the justice department. We need to look at the health department, we need to look at education and we need to look at policing. It needs to be across the board. It is a big task, but I would implore the government to prioritise this for victims of sexual violence and all Victorian women.

Ms BATH (Eastern Victoria) (14:12): I am very pleased to rise this afternoon to speak on Mr Grimley's motion 752 on the notice paper. It is an area that I have to say I am certainly not an expert in, and maybe that is a good thing. But as members of Parliament we have exposure to people, we have exposure to victim-survivors, who come into our offices and write emails and seek assistance for whatever their particular issue or pathway is. In coming into this role I have certainly had an education in the world of sexual assault that occurs right across our state and also in the integrity, the guts, the determination, the will, the fragility and the scars of people who have had this perpetrated against them—predominantly women but it can be across the board—and how their lives have been changed and altered and damaged and then, I hope, healed by coming forward and telling their story and, if they can, taking it through to holding perpetrators to account. I know I can say that in *Hansard*, but the reality is it is a very difficult road and a very exhausting road for people on that journey.

One of my first experiences in coming into this role was with the then Shadow Minister for Police, Mr Ed O'Donohue. We went to the Morwell police station and in particular the sexual offences and child abuse investigation team, SOCIT, and had a conversation with them about the work they do. The level of integrity that they have, to go into those dark places where they need to go, is to be commended and respected—how they investigate and bring people to justice but also deal with the victims of that.

My experience extends to a very, very credible and tremendous professional group called the Gippsland Centre against Sexual Assault, GCASA. I know that there are centres against sexual assault (CASAs) across the state and the very important work they do, again with huge integrity, and the adaptability that they need to take an individual who is coming in to report a crime, who does come in to access their services and to work out the nuanced approach that is required to triage that particular person and provide them with the services that they need and hopefully support them on that pathway.

The Victorian Law Reform Commission report entitled *Improving the Justice System Response to Sexual Offences* is a 600-page document, and it contains extensive recommendations to support outcomes for victim-survivors. It is a substantial body of work that I am sure all levels of government need to be addressing, and affiliated advocacy groups, I am sure, have provided significant input into that report. Those very serious recommendations, some 90-odd of them, with subsections really need to be addressed.

But one of the key things that Mr Grimley has come out with is that 87 per cent of people who experience sexual violence do not report it to the police. That is a huge and overwhelming majority, and it is deeply concerning that people do not feel that they can report this for whatever reason, whether it is that they are wanting to explore other processes, that they have a negative response towards reporting to police, that they have fear around it, both internally and with their explanation being dealt with externally, or that they think it is just not serious enough—all of those things. We need to explore and work out the ways that the Victorian government and people can turn around that 87 per cent. What one human being can do to another is just mind blowing, and as I said before, I am very grateful that we have these professionals working in our system.

One of the comments from speaking to GCASA was about the integration of our system. The statewide 24-hour hotline is a very important and accessible service, and I would urge the government, when it comes up to the budget, to continue and give consideration to higher funding of that crisis hotline. Also the collaboration and the ability of those various groups—VicPol, SOCITs, CASAs and advocacy groups—to work together is a really important point, working through the crisis response and the forensic response at a time when the victim, the person coming forward, needs that support.

In relation to the sexual assault reporting option as an alternative mechanism to allow victims to report a range of sexual crimes and receive that support, we know that the South Eastern Centre against Sexual Assault, SECASA, ran an almost decade-long trial. It was receiving reports, approximately 1200 annually, until it was terminated through lack of funding in 2020. This trial provided a really good opportunity for people to have a different access point, have a different platform, and it is worth continuing in a statewide format. To that point, last year The Nationals and the Liberals made our firm

commitment that if we are elected on 26 November this year, we will introduce an informal SARO police link platform similar to that in New South Wales.

The reason for that is that we need to turn around that huge figure of non-reporting. We know that the first step to better support and prevention is in relation to really targeting different modes of reporting. We also know that the New South Wales model operates with New South Wales police and with sexual assault and consent advocate Chanel Contos, and that is a really important mechanism again to see how a therapeutic response can be elicited as well. I understand that the New South Wales model is up for review and improvement, and that is very much a workable and responsible mechanism to have. Anything that is trialled and rolled out needs to be fine-tuned and tweaked to be able to provide that better service to individuals.

Really Victoria is the only state that does not have some form of this type of platform. We have said it before: The Nationals and the Liberals will certainly be able to make a commitment to work with VicPol, to work with the CASAs and to work with the advocacy groups. The outcomes Victorians seek are better support for victim-survivors and to hold those perpetrators to account.

Finally, a shout-out to an organisation from my electorate of Eastern Victoria Region, Gippsland Women's Health, based up in Sale. I know that they have done over time and continue to do some very important work in, for example, our sporting clubs about sexual assault, about mental health, about family violence and really providing some of that background for people who are just working through their normal sporting outlet and enjoying that sport. It is a really good mechanism to target those young people who are enjoying their endeavours and provide a platform for discussion and hopefully thought-provoking encouragement for victims to be able to come through and to call out unacceptable behaviour, and certainly family violence, sexual violence and violence of any form is to be called out. The Nationals will certainly support Mr Grimley's motion to the house today.

Ms WATT (Northern Metropolitan) (14:22): As I rise to speak on this motion regarding sexual assault reporting options I would like to take a moment to note that the Andrews Labor government has always been committed to delivering essential reforms for victims of crime. It was this government that first created a dedicated portfolio in the Parliament for victim support. It was a significant step in listening to the needs of victim-survivors and then acting on them. It showed that victims of crime were heard and seen by the Parliament and that victims of crime are consistently being heard in the cabinet. It was truly a very welcome step from this government. However, the work does not stop there, and we must always recognise the harm suffered by victims of crime and commit to doing whatever we can to make their experience of the criminal justice system a respectful one.

The Victorian Law Reform Commission last year tabled the report *Improving the Justice System Response to Sexual Offences*. In this report, amongst its many comprehensive findings and recommendations, the VLRC identified online reporting as an important option for addressing high levels of under-reporting of sexual offences, giving people more choice in how they report a sexual offence. The Victorian government is carefully considering all of the VLRC's 91 recommendations and remains committed to improving the experiences of victim-survivors throughout the justice system.

Work is already underway to improve justice system responses to victim-survivors of sexual offences. The Victorian government has already committed to major reforms that make it clear that there is no place for sexual violence in our state. We have delivered a \$5.2 million funding boost to specialist sexual assault services to address an unexpected spike in referrals for services following the release of the VLRC report late last year. This funding allowed them to hire extra staff and provide specialist support sessions to hundreds more victim-survivors.

Before I go on can I just take a moment to acknowledge and thank the many very talented, skilled workers in this area. I have had the pleasure of meeting workers in specialist sexual assault services, and I thank them for their resilience, their strength and their profound commitment to supporting

victim-survivors. It really is an extraordinary person that takes up this work, and I just want to take a moment to thank them for giving many hours of their day and probably creating many sleepless nights to continue their work supporting victims.

Mr Grimley: On a point of order, Deputy President, can Ms Watt just speak up a little bit? I find it really, really hard to hear.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: It is not actually a point of order. But, Ms Watt, if you could speak a little bit louder, it would help. It is difficult to hear you.

Ms WATT: All right, thank you for picking that up again. I appreciate it, as you did last time. Maybe I just needed to move my microphone. There you go. Thank you, Hansard team, for your continued magic over in the corner.

In the most recent state budget—here we go, I can hear myself; my goodness—we dedicated a \$64 million package for victim support. The vast majority of that package has been allocated to financial assistance and improving support services for victims. We have announced that we are adopting a new affirmative model of consent for Victoria in line with the recommendation from the Victorian Law Reform Commission, and we will work to develop this model. Can I just say that work is indeed underway. This change will send a clear message that a person has responsibility to say or do something to obtain consent prior to engaging in sexual activity with another person. Importantly, it will help to shift the focus away from the actions of the victim-survivor to those of the accused. I could talk about that for quite some time, but I will continue on with my remarks. But I might be compelled to go into just how very important that step is.

We will also amend laws to explicitly criminalise stealthing. I have spoken about that before—the removal of a condom or other protection during sex without the other person’s knowledge or consent. This change makes it clear that this act is a violation of consent and against the law. My colleague in the other place the Minister for Victim Support, Natalie Hutchins, is delivering these key reforms and has recently released the Victorian government’s *Victim Support Update*. This update outlines the key reforms this government is delivering for victims of crime and exemplifies a Victorian government that is working hard to ensure that victims of crime are heard. We are ensuring they have the scope to tell their stories and participate in the process of reforming the system, which needs to be able to support them.

Continuing on with the VLRC, they recently made it especially clear that to address sexual violence, abuse and harm we need to deliver meaningful and large-scale reform, and the Victorian government remains committed to achieving these reforms. We are continuing to consult on and develop reforms to prevent and address sexual violence, abuse and harm that will capture our response to the recommendations of the Victorian Law Reform Commission. We are engaging closely with stakeholders on these reforms proposed by the VLRC, including this critical reform for online reporting, and we look forward to providing a report on the consultation findings in due time. The development of an online reporting mechanism will be an important part of our work to improve responses to and outcomes for victim-survivors; however, if the government were to act in accordance with this motion this would in fact derail some of the work that is already afoot. The work of the VLRC and the delivery of their report is indeed comprehensive, and the priorities and the planning that need to come from that must be carefully balanced. We cannot rush our response to the recommendations or the implementation of the recommendations, and we are already closely engaging with stakeholders on the VLRC’s report, including, importantly, regarding reforming online reporting.

The VLRC reminded us that even though sexual violence is widespread it is indeed one of the most under-reported crimes not only here in our state but nationally and indeed globally. Sadly around 87 per cent of people who experience sexual violence do not report it to police. That is a really stark number. Only about half even seek support from anyone at all, usually a friend or a family member or somebody in their trusted circle. The reasons why someone might not report sexual violence are

complex—feelings of shame and embarrassment and societal stigma, which continues towards sexual violence—and there is for many a lack of trust in the justice system. These are just some of the reasons that have been heard from victim-survivors about why sexual violence has not been reported.

Sometimes people from migrant and refugee backgrounds do not know how to recognise sexual violence, and indeed sexual violence in marriage is still a crime. It does take me back to my time working with community services and some of the growing awareness work that needed to happen with our culturally and linguistically diverse communities around this work. We also know that some groups and communities still face serious barriers to addressing the justice system. For example, people with cognitive and communication disabilities or people who communicate in a language other than English may not have the support they need to make a report, and people living in rural and remote locations may not have access to a police station handy.

The Victorian government is committed to helping all victim-survivors to come forward to seek the support they need to deal with these experiences, to seek justice and to begin to recover. Trust in the justice system remains an issue and is a contributing factor in unreported sexual violence by survivors, and this is particularly the case for First Nations communities and for those communities who have experiences of child removal and racism in the justice system.

Just a quick moment to say that traditionally persecuted communities like the LGBTIQ+ community and sex workers are understandably hesitant to report crimes due to a lack of trust in the system. Also, people living in out-of-home care or other care or custodial services face unique barriers to reporting, including not having access to a trusted person that they can tell. There are of course also barriers commonly experienced by children and young people in residential care, people in mental health inpatient units, women in prison and people in residential aged care.

There are also currently limited options for reporting. Ultimately victim-survivors told the VLRC that it is important to have more choice, and we look forward to continuing to work with victim-survivors right across our state to make life a little easier for them and their loved ones.

Dr CUMMING (Western Metropolitan) (14:33): I rise to speak on the Justice Party's call for the government to actually commit to implementing an online additional alternative reporting mechanism for sexual assault and to begin engagement, consultation and a round table with stakeholders to develop an evidence-based reporting option for sexual assault.

Just to hear the government say that they are carefully considering this—for me, it should be the top of their priority list. It should have been done above a lot of other priorities that this government has had while the Justice Party has spent the last three years in this house sticking up for victims and especially victims of sexual assaults.

I commend the Justice Party for doing this, because there needs to be an ability online. Especially as we have just gone through the pandemic and there has been an increase in children being abused at home, we need to actually have the recommendations that were laid before this government taken up. They should not be carefully considering them; they should be throwing money towards them.

What we can see, which is in plain sight, is that the majority of people who have undergone sexual assault do not feel comfortable reporting it to police. It is under-reported. For the children that are abused there are no mechanisms to come forward, and we should be creating those mechanisms in the year 2022. There have been trials for this. We are behind the rest of Australia in the way of actually having an online system that people can just get onto and feel comfortable reporting their sexual assault on, but they should be believed.

I am so happy that the Justice Party has put this forward for all victims of crime, especially our children. For me, in this place I have brought up numerous times that there is a massive under-reporting of male sexual assault, men as victims. They do not feel comfortable coming forward. They do not feel like they will be believed when they go to police stations. We need an informal, confidential, anonymous

system that is online so that people who have been sexually abused can get on and actually get the counselling help that they need and be able to be referred to services. The government also needs to spend money on getting the right amount of staff for the police and for the Centre Against Sexual Assault and the other sexual assault agencies that are out there in the community so that they are properly resourced.

I commend the motion. I want the government to actually take action rather than using their sneaky little words of 'carefully considering' and 'we're not quite sure if we have enough time or resources for this'. Government, make this a priority, and do it now.

Mr LIMBRICK (South Eastern Metropolitan) (14:37): I am pleased to speak on Mr Grimley's motion, which seeks some action on recommendations from the Victorian Law Reform Commission report titled *Improving the Justice System Response to Sexual Offences*, which was tabled last year. These types of crimes can represent the most serious violation of a person's body and self. They are crimes that can occur in private and involve a breach of trust from someone known to the victim-survivor and, worse, sometimes in a position of power. As the report notes, sexual violence can be:

... difficult to disclose because of ... community attitudes and feelings of shame ...

This touches on just one area that creates a barrier to more of these crimes being reported. Mr Grimley's motion acts on two of these recommendations from the report. It acts on recommendation 19, which states that:

The Victorian Government should resource sexual assault support services to receive and respond to disclosures of sexual violence online and through a central website.

and also recommendation 20, which states that:

Victoria Police, in collaboration with sexual assault support services, should develop an online pathway to reporting sexual offences.

The report also has a whole section on online reporting options. There are multiple benefits to online reporting. For some victims the process itself may provide benefit in having a place to disclose. It may also be a more comfortable pathway to make the first contact with a sexual assault counselling service. Through this interaction people may move towards counselling or even lodging a formal report to police. Also increased data on the occurrence of these crimes can be beneficial in understanding crime trends so that preventative measures can be established or in assisting police with investigating and prosecuting crimes.

However, it is not without risks. Any system needs to be trauma informed and victim focused. If people want to make an anonymous report, it should not be subject to police warrant or subpoena. There is also a risk of disadvantage in the court if an online report does not match the detail in a subsequent police report. These are not reasons that should prevent the establishment of such a system; I simply note that it is very important to get the details right.

A well-designed system that offers potential benefit to people who have suffered from these crimes is worth pursuing. Improving our knowledge of where and when these crimes are occurring may also improve community safety, as will the possibility of prosecuting the perpetrators of these crimes. The Liberal Democrats support this motion.

Ms TAYLOR (Southern Metropolitan) (14:40): I am very pleased to be able to speak on this motion today, and I thank everyone for their contributions. I probably would just like to pick up on a couple of points that have been raised in the chamber. The inference that somehow it is not a priority of the government is erroneous, and I actually take exception to that for all the people who are working in a very concerted way on this matter. If we can just put to bed that particular assertion, because I think it is actually insulting and it may be quite alarming to victim-survivors as well to somehow make an inference for which there is no evidence. If I can just make it clear: it is a clear priority of our government. We take this issue very seriously, and there is nothing sneaky about what we are doing

here; I would like to dispel that myth as well. I think we are being very transparent and up-front about the process which is being undertaken to pursue this very, very important issue.

With regard specifically to looking at issues of other states and stakeholder feedback, which I think is pivotal in this discussion, and when we are looking at online reporting mechanisms, which is a key subject that we have been discussing here in this debate, we aim to deliver a model that is accessible and designed with the best interests of victim-survivors in mind. I would suggest that is part of the prioritisation of course. We have listened to calls from the Victorian Law Reform Commission, stakeholders and advocates such as Chanel Contos to explore models that have been implemented in other jurisdictions, including the sexual assault reporting option in New South Wales and the alternative reporting option in Queensland. I note there has been some discussion on those matters here today, but I would like to make some further points with regard to that.

It is very easy to make emphatic statements but when we are looking at such a difficult and delicate issue, particularly for victim-survivors principally, then you can appreciate why the process is being undertaken in such a careful manner. It is imperative that any additional reporting mechanisms are informed by the needs of affected Victorians; I would like to think there is not any discord or disagreement on that particular issue. We have heard how online platforms can offer positive interventions for sexual violence, so I think there is some unison on that point as well. But can I put this qualifier: the VLRC also heard that models used in other jurisdictions could be improved to better support victim-survivors to access information and support services while engaging in the police reporting process. So you can see already that the government is actually being extremely prudent and is examining very carefully the best possible mechanism for Victoria, rather than saying, 'Oh, well, New South Wales is doing it; we must therefore do what they are doing'. I am not saying we should not do what they are doing, but we must make sure that we optimise the solution that we have here for Victoria.

The VLRC found that there are important things to consider before a model like the one operating in New South Wales could be implemented in Victoria. I am very carefully making that point because I think there was a little bit of a rushed inference, perhaps, by some that, 'Oh, well, we simply pivot to that, and it's all solved'. I put it to the chamber that we should be very prudent and understand that we are making a concerted effort to get the best possible outcome for those impacted and for those who we want to benefit from the model that is put in place. That is why we will work closely with victim-survivors, specialist legal and sexual assault services and Victoria Police to ensure that the model developed in Victoria is clear, effective and safe, and I am pretty confident that the chamber would be united insofar as wanting a clear, effective and safe model to be put in place for Victoria.

I think much has been said today—and certainly there is no disagreement here—that having trust in the justice system does remain an issue.

A member interjected.

Ms TAYLOR: Absolutely. In particular that is the case for Aboriginal communities, who have experienced colonisation, child removal and racism from the justice system, so it is very evident why there would be trust issues there, and I think we would all have great compassion and understanding for that, or I would like to think we would; communities that have been criminalised in the past—and I notice that Ms Watt referred to this—the LGBTQI+ communities; communities that face criminalisation now, such as people who work in the sex industry or women in contact with the justice system; and people who have been removed from their families by police or other authorities.

I think it is fairly safe to say that it is a very, very personal space, and I am not saying anything that would not be obvious to everyone in the chamber, but noting the very personal and the very delicate nature of the kinds of criminal matters that we are talking about, it is understandable of itself why there would be some hesitancy to proceed to report these matters. I proffer that it is also difficult even to tell those who you are close to, because it is so personal. I think telling anyone, rather than holding on to

sometimes these dreadful and very traumatic experiences, takes a huge amount of energy and certainly a lot of courage. I am hesitant about even using that word, because it is very revealing for that person. It is exposing them; it is a very vulnerable point. So I think that human nature itself would explain why there are apparent barriers in addition to those that we have already enunciated with regard to communities who have been through some extraordinarily negative experiences—through colonisation and the like, as I referred to—over many, many years. Having said that, it is all the more reason to get this right and all the more reason to get an optimised outcome for those who are most at risk and who have been impacted by extraordinary and traumatic events.

I do want to refer to another issue with regard to Engage Victoria and the motion. I just want to address that issue as well—the call to ‘begin an Engage Victoria consultation’. Can I put it to the chamber that that is unnecessary and could be problematic by repeating consultations and delaying work on the reporting alternative as well as other reforms. Sometimes we have to peel back the reality of the situation and really examine closely what the true ramifications of various proposals might be, and specifically in the motion itself. So noting the delicacy of this matter, I just want to be very clear about that, to understand why. This is the beauty of having this debate, so you can understand the rationale behind the decisions that are being made with regard to such delicate and difficult but vital matters that we are discussing here today.

I put it to the chamber that specifying a time frame is also problematic in light of the existing process and design complexity, and so I think that should be considered in an appropriate way by the chamber. Understand that it is not, as has been inferred, a lack of prioritisation or otherwise; it is actually being fully aware of the ramifications of the decisions being made and the necessity to optimise this model for the best interests of victim-survivors. If nothing else, if we can have a unified position in striving to have the best possible outcome for victim-survivors, then that is certainly a positive outcome from this debate today, because certainly that is the priority of our government, and we stand by that.

I think the other issue that I would like to leave the debate with—I should say I am not leaving the chamber—is that, if nothing else, when we do discuss and debate these issues, hopefully it gives more victims the courage to come forward and to report when they are involved in traumatic incidents. I hope that that is also a positive that can come out of this debate today.

Mr FINN (Western Metropolitan) (14:49): I rise to support the motion moved by Mr Grimley, and in the very, very brief period of time I have, I support this motion on the basis that anything which helps victims achieve justice is a very good thing. This is surely that situation, because there is a degree—and an understandable degree—of reluctance on the part of some people to report a sexual offence. I think part of that is a feeling of humiliation, a feeling that it is somehow the victim’s fault that this happened. I, for the life of me, do not understand that, but that is how some people feel, and unfortunately there are some people in the community who go out of their way to make them feel like that.

I think this is a very good move if we can put in place a sexual assault reporting option in the way Mr Grimley has proposed. I think that would be a very, very good move and something that would help an inordinate number of people who might otherwise just let it go through to the keeper. Any sort of assault but sexual assault in particular is something that should face the full wrath of the law, and this proposal put forward by Mr Grimley today I believe will get the ball rolling. I commend him for putting this motion forward, and indeed I commend the motion to the house. I assure you that certainly it will have my support—not just this motion today but if indeed the government was to pick it up and run with it, then it would certainly have my support in terms of legislation as well. I sincerely hope that we can see this in legislation in the not-too-distant future, and I hope that the government members will accept that and take it on board. Certainly I very strongly support this motion.

Mr GRIMLEY (Western Victoria) (14:52): Thanks, everyone, for sharing your thoughts on this motion today. I was pleased to hear some very positive conversations coming out of it, at the very least. Just to sum up, I suppose, when we have a number of victim-survivors of sexual assault speaking

up and saying that we need alternative reporting options, we should listen. When we have Victoria Police saying that we need alternative reporting options, then we should listen. Sexual Assault Services Victoria and the Sexual Assault and Family Violence Centre both say we need alternative reporting options. We must listen to them all and do what we can. Child Safe Strategies and a range of other stakeholders are all saying the same thing: we need alternative reporting options for victims of sexual assault. We must listen and we must act.

Eighty-seven per cent of sexual crimes go unreported. That has been bandied around here quite a bit today. Just for context, in the 10 years to 2019 in Victoria there were 84 333 sex offences recorded by police. That works out to be around 8400 per year—that is the recorded offences. Given that 87 per cent are not reported and given the statistics by the Sentencing Advisory Council—and if my maths is correct, and I do stand corrected—that means around 56 000 sexual offences in Victoria in one year are not reported. That means 56 000 voices are not being heard per year, and that means 56 000 victims of crime are not being recognised every year. That is just astounding. This motion seeks to give those victims of crime a voice where they otherwise would not have one. This motion is about putting action together from words, because words alone will not fix this issue. It is about putting power and control back to the victims of crime.

Thanks again to Mikaylah, Debbie and Georgina for coming along today to the chamber. I really appreciate your help and support and advocacy on this issue. And thanks again to the chamber for the support for this motion. Now is the time for action.

Motion agreed to.

Business of the house

NOTICES OF MOTION

Ms MAXWELL (Northern Victoria) (14:55): I move:

That the consideration of notice of motion, general business, 729, be postponed until later this day.

Motion agreed to.

Motions

POLITICAL DONATIONS

Mr HAYES (Southern Metropolitan) (14:56): I move:

That this house notes that:

- (1) it is critical for public trust in democracy that impartiality in government decision-making not only exists but is seen to exist;
- (2) weak donation laws undermine the public's trust in Victoria's political and bureaucratic processes, by creating perceived conflicts with the flow of money and undue influence in government;
- (3) donations from sectors who rely on the issuing of government permits is highly problematic for public trust;
- (4) a political donation is defined as a gift of money, services, loans, guarantees or property;
- (5) the following donations are not currently categorised as gifts:
 - (a) donations made through attendance at party fundraisers;
 - (b) annual subscriptions to political parties registered in Victoria;
 - (c) annual levies to political parties registered in Victoria;
- (6) subsection 5(2) of the NSW Election Funding Act 2018 relating to political donations specifically states that 'an amount paid by a person as a contribution, entry fee or other payment to entitle that or any other person to participate in or otherwise obtain any benefit from a fundraising venture or function (being an amount that forms part of the gross proceeds of the venture or function)';

and calls on the government to broaden the definition of 'donation' to include income from party fundraisers, corporate sponsorship of business forums, annual levies and membership fees over \$1000 per year.

I thank Ms Maxwell. At a time when public trust in politics is at an all-time low and the public claims lack of integrity in political and bureaucratic processes, if Victoria is to get serious about regulating the undue influence of money in government, we must strengthen our laws to deliver more transparency and reform our political donations practices. I have raised this matter before in the house. There is a perception of corruption from donations by certain industries, sectors of our economy who donate to certain parties yet who also rely on the issuing of government permits from those parties. It is highly problematic for public trust. Powerful industries can corrupt our democracy. Both Victoria and Australia are lagging behind almost all the other advanced democracies when it comes to regulating corporate influence. It is not unrealistic to conclude that a politician or party would not want to upset an industry that is funding its election campaign. As well as favourable treatment, these donations buy big corporations access to politicians that ordinary people would never get. Left unchecked this cycle will get worse. We need strong protection and uniform laws to protect us from harmful practices. The High Court has described this as offering quid pro quo corruption, a subtle kind of corruption where politicians decide issues not according to the public interest or the wishes of their constituents but according to the wishes of the donor.

The Grattan Institute has highlighted the need to know more about who donates to our political parties. According to the AEC, in 2021 the two major parties declared income totalling more than \$150 million, but declared donations make up only 9 per cent of this. This must raise the alarm bells. What happened to the other 91 per cent of donations? That is over \$136 million unaccounted for. Yes, this is federal, but the same thing happens in Victoria. In Victoria most political parties' incomes are undeclared. They fall into the messy bucket called 'other receipts'. These include money contributed through fundraising functions—money paid by individuals and corporations clearly intended to support the party. Tickets to fundraising dinners and memberships are not counted as donations under our weak electoral laws, even though they serve exactly the same function as a direct contribution to a party. According to calculations done by the Centre for Public Integrity, our political parties have received \$4.5 billion since 1999. This includes \$1.38 billion with no apparent source, so that each of the major parties ends up receiving hundreds of millions of dollars in unexplained wealth.

On a federal level, in 2017 Woodside Energy appeared before a parliamentary committee and gave the Australian public a glimpse into what a corporate membership to either the Liberal or Labor Party buys them. This sort of corporate membership is worth some \$110 000. It gives the purchaser access to briefings, including forums, dinners with the Prime Minister, tickets to drinks, briefings on the federal budget and more. Now, I ask: does anyone think that such corporate membership should continue to be excluded from transparent reporting?

In today's motion I address the issue, an issue of great concern to Victorians: the issue of undisclosed donations. How can we have a transparent and accountable system where so much party income is from unexplained origins? In Victoria our current donation definitions are far too narrow and create loopholes. We need definitions of donations or gifts which include party fundraisers, subscriptions, membership fees and corporate sponsorship. As noted in my motion:

- (5) the following donations are not currently categorised as gifts:
 - (a) donations made through attendance at party fundraisers;
 - (b) annual subscriptions to political parties registered in Victoria—

some expensive subscriptions are out there, I will say—

- (c) annual levies to political parties registered in Victoria ...

We would all like to know how much our politicians pay to their parties for a seat. When it comes to dinners, lunches, fundraising events et cetera we need a more encompassing definition like in the New South Wales Electoral Funding Act 2018, which states that political donations include:

An amount paid by a person as a contribution, entry fee or other payment to entitle that ... person to participate in or otherwise obtain any benefit from a fundraising venture or function ...

These loopholes mean major donors can hide from public scrutiny and voters cannot be sure who is really backing political parties.

Despite consistent calls for donation reform over a decade, both major parties continue to resist the public need for greater transparency. The Human Rights Law Centre have also raised this issue in a powerful document called *Selling Out: How Powerful Industries Corrupt Our Democracy*, covering extensive issues across the gambling, tobacco and mining industries. The summation from the document is that:

Corporate influence in our politics is distorting our democratic processes. We need to hit reset on our democracy and reform our laws to ensure our politicians respond to voters, not vested corporate interests.

They say that:

Current breakdowns of proportions of party income by source are a murky mess.

I have also raised the issue in the house before of property developer donations and their influence over planning policy and development decisions. Greater transparency and accountability are urgently needed. Research by the Australian Conservation Foundation revealed that the gas industry companies were the biggest fossil fuel industry donors in 2020, around the same time as the gas-fired recovery was announced. What a coincidence, eh? Would you believe it!

The Australia Institute says this reflects a wider trend that sectors' donations correlate with the election cycle and also with project approval and debates on key industry policies. The strengthening of our donation laws is supported by all the independent integrity agencies. The Accountability Round Table says that:

... the present system provides real opportunities for corruption and the temptation to corrupt.

"The process creates a situation where persons who wish to engage in corrupt behaviour are given every opportunity, and the political party concerned becomes indebted to the people who made donations."

They say donation laws must be transparent, with the objective of 'ensuring a reduction in undue influence'.

The Centre for Public Integrity have the same message and say:

It is critical for public trust in democracy that impartiality in government decision-making not only exist but be *seen* to exist.

And:

Current disclosure regulations allow the majority of political donations to be hidden.

Anthony Whealy QC, the centre's chair, said:

We need urgent reform to clean up the undue influence of money in politics ...

In an article just last week in the *Guardian* Catherine Williams, research director at the Centre for Public Integrity, when addressing political fundraising events, said:

The difference between the cost of running the event and the fee—
charged—

needs to be explicitly captured as a donation. That's how they do it in New South Wales.

We believe we should do the same thing here. Catherine Williams also highlighted the need for caps on election spending, for ministerial diaries to be published and for the expansion of IBAC's powers.

Deborah Glass, the Victorian Ombudsman, said:

There can be little doubt that the lack of transparency in political donations and the lack of limitations on who can make those donations in Victoria creates an environment in which allegations of improper conduct can flourish ...

Whether they are substantiated or not, whether such allegations are legitimately made or are made for political mischief-making as is often claimed, is not the point.

Ultimately, they create a perception that politicians can be bought, which reduces public trust in government.

State politics has often been tainted by crooked donations. Just last month the Independent Commission Against Corruption made findings of corruption against people including former New South Wales Labor MP Ernest Wong over attempts to conceal a \$100 000 donation from a Chinese billionaire apparently left behind in a shopping bag in party headquarters by accident. And there is evidence here in Victoria of hidden donations. In 2020 the Victorian Liberal Party's fundraising arm allegedly diverted hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of contributions into a federal campaign fund in what looked like an attempt to sidestep more strict local disclosure rules. This is a well-known backdoor method for hiding large undisclosed donations, making them through the federal arm of any party organisation. IBAC was told during hearings into the Casey land scandal how John Woodman, the allegedly corrupt property developer, avoided publicly disclosing his \$70 000 contribution to Enterprise Victoria in 2019 by splitting the payments into \$10 000 lots and donating them from multiple different companies. Enterprise Victoria's former executive director Amy Sullivan said splitting contributions in this way was 'not uncommon'.

Victorian MPs have also been identified attending fundraisers where funds have been allegedly raised to enable branch stacking. Is it okay for high-profile identities to grow their power base using their publicly elected roles to host fundraisers which raise cash which is then used to help them gain control over preselection and internal party processes? It may not be deliberate, but it does demonstrate how MPs can be, maybe unwittingly, caught up in events that raise money for unethical purposes. Self-confessed branch stacker turned whistleblower Anthony Byrne said it was common knowledge amongst attendees that dinners held by Labor groups were used to gain cash for paying for other members' subscription fees.

Regardless of what IBAC's recommendations are in the coming weeks, it is obvious to blind Freddy that our weak laws do not curtail these types of activities. The sums of money involved are not small change; they are more than sufficient to buy influence and create incentives for politicians to reward donors. They encourage a sense of expectation for donors, including substantial corporations. It is the anticipation of a profitable result from government that drives corporate giving to politicians.

Many speak about the system in Canada and how we should use it as a benchmark. In Canada only people on the electoral roll can donate and only to a maximum of 1675 Canadian dollars per year, and that is aggregated to all parties' constituency associations and independent candidates. This ensures that citizens are central to the electoral process and prevents corporations from dominating political debate during election campaigns. It would really be something if we could achieve something like that. They also have caps on campaign expenditure. You could say Canada's lower level of public funding does not seem to have harmed Canadian democracy. Indeed the reforms have decentralised fundraising and hence control of political parties, something that Victoria's rank-and-file branch party members should welcome.

And it seems that this is what the voters want. In South Australia the new leader, Peter Malinauskas, said in a pre-election promise that he would ban all political donations. He also said this is:

... the single biggest thing we can do to restore public trust in our democracy.

It seems that their voters agree. Political parties are private entities in the centre of the public realm of democracy. They occupy a pivotal position in our political system and should be obliged to greater levels of transparency about their sources of income. As we head towards election 2022 we must ask ourselves what kind of democracy we want: one that can be bought by those with the deepest pockets or one where, through appropriate regulation, equality of participation is protected? The barrier to reform is not lack of solutions or even lack of community support but lack of state leadership and political will.

Community support for donation reform is high. Elaine from Warrnambool sums up the current situation well:

What will it take for the major parties to act?

Given the millions of dollars in declared donations and the mega-millions of undeclared donations, we have to wonder whether we ... have a ... election or an auction ... In an election, we get what we vote for. In an auction, the biggest bidders get ownership and use of whatever they have bought.

... Is either of the major parties likely to do anything voluntarily to stem this flow of dodgy funding?

I seriously hope so. It is time for integrity and transparency, and I commend this motion to the house.

Mr TARLAMIS (South Eastern Metropolitan) (15:12): I also rise to speak on Mr Hayes's motion. There is a lot to unpack in that. I will do my best to address many of those issues raised in the time that I have allotted to me, but I doubt that I will be able to cover them all. I will start by just saying that I think there are a lot of issues there that are conflated between federal and state jurisdictions. I will come to that a little bit more in a moment, but I want to just basically begin by saying that the government does agree—and there is a lot in it that I disagree with—that public trust in democracy is important and that weak donation laws undermine that trust. That is why in 2018 we took action to implement the strictest and most transparent donation disclosure laws in Australia, and it is something that we stand very proud of, because we led the country in doing that.

Mr Finn interjected.

Mr TARLAMIS: Mr Finn, you can interject, but you were opposed to it at the time and we had to drag you kicking and screaming to do it. You can interject all you like, but we did it and you did not. You did not support it. We did it, and we stand proud of having done it.

We reject the assertion that the donation laws in Victoria are weak. They are the strictest in the country. It is all very well to point to elements of other systems like New South Wales and talk about how you might like this and you might like that, but it is important that you look at the system in its entirety and look at whether or not it is effective and whether or not it covers all the aspects in terms of what it does.

What we did in Victoria is we looked at the entirety of the system so that we could ensure that we were picking up all elements in terms of the donation system, so that we could cover off on not just political parties but third-party activities as well and so that we could shut down alternative loopholes and stop the money from flowing between third parties and political parties. We made conscious choices to try and put in place a regime that was effective and would be able to regulate the system so that it was stopping that flow of funding. Basically it ensures that Victorians know who is making donations and who is receiving political donations. It includes real time, and it effectively applies to individuals and corporations and stops them from buying influence within Victorian politics.

The measures include a political donation disclosure and reporting scheme with currently a \$1050 disclosure threshold that is indexed and requires real-time disclosure; caps on political donations, currently at \$4210 per election cycle—that is a four-year period; bans on foreign donations; caps on anonymous donations, currently at \$1050; ensuring that bodies and organisations involved in political fundraising or campaigning are also held to the same restrictions and scrutiny, including the requirement that they submit annual returns to the Victorian Electoral Commission; and stronger penalties for breaching the laws as well as anti-avoidance mechanisms.

It basically means that regardless of whether you are an individual, a small business or an organisation, whether you are a large corporation or a wealthy individual, the laws apply to you evenly. I think it needs to be reinforced that the cap that applies currently at \$4210 over a four-year period applies to everyone—individuals and corporations.

Mr Finn: But not unions.

Mr TARLAMIS: Actually, it does, Mr Finn. Unions as well as organisations are capped at \$4210 for the four-year cycle, so it does apply to them. It does apply to them in terms of donations. It does, so you are wrong. Yet, again, you are wrong.

Mr Ondarchie: So they cannot run a campaign then?

Mr TARLAMIS: No, they can. Like any third-party campaigner, they can run a campaign. The Minerals Council of Australia or anyone else, your friends that want to run individual campaigns, can run campaigns as well. They can run them in their own name so there is transparency. The whole system is designed so that there is transparency. People can see who is campaigning, who is spending money and what they are saying, so there can be a weighting attributed to it and the voter can make a choice as to who is saying what, attribute a weighting to that and see whether they accept that argument. That applies to everyone across the board. But if people do want to engage in that space—

Mr Finn interjected.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Bourman): Mr Finn!

Mr Ondarchie interjected.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Bourman): Mr Ondarchie! Do not force me to stand. I do not feel like it. But can everyone just let Mr Tarlamis get on with this?

Mr TARLAMIS: What you fail to recognise is that anyone who wants to engage in that political space is required to establish a state campaign account. Any funds going into that account must be subjected to the donation requirements and the caps, and any expenditure on the campaign must come out of that account also. So it is fully transparent, and they must supply an annual return to the electoral commission as well. That way that organisation can enter into that space, regardless of who they are, and they can campaign. It is fully transparent and badges them so the public can make a conscious choice as to the messaging that they are seeing, know who is conveying that messaging and choose whether or not they believe it and want to accept the argument.

It is transparency out there for all to see. It was never there before, it is fully accountable and the caps apply across the board. This argument has been brought to this place on a number of occasions before by Mr Hayes and others—that we should not have this system that applies equally across the board to everybody and that we should simply ban people like property developers. If we had gone down that path in 2018 and simply banned property developers to the exclusion of anyone else, who decides who is captured by the donation scheme and who is not? Do we just on an ad hoc basis bring people in that we think we should be targeting? This applies to everybody equally across the board. The threshold is sufficiently low that no-one can purchase influence whatsoever.

It is interesting that Mr Hayes cites Canada as a model and talks about the Canadian cap and says we should be looking at the Canadian model. He said, I believe, if I heard correctly—and correct me if I did not—that in Canada the cap is \$1680 per year. Well, if my calculations are correct, that would mean that over a four-year period they could donate \$6720. Well, funnily enough, in Victoria you can only donate \$4210. That means you can actually donate more under the Canadian system than you can under the Victorian system, so now you are actually advocating for a model where you could donate more money.

Your motion also talks about the New South Wales system. Well, under the New South Wales system you can donate \$6700 a year, so that means \$28 000 or something like that, but they do not have real-time disclosure either.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Bourman): Order! Mr Tarlamis, through the Chair. Thanks.

Mr TARLAMIS: Sorry. Through you, Acting President, New South Wales also do not have real-time disclosure, and there are a number of other mechanisms that they do not have as well. This is the

problem when you look at systems on an ad hoc basis and you cherry-pick from different systems to talk about ‘It’d be nice to have that’ or ‘It’d be nice to have that’.

What we did in Victoria was try to establish a holistic system that went across the board and covered off all aspects. We knew that we were going from a system where there were effectively very few donation requirements in place. We were subject to what was happening at the federal level, which was an absolute joke. That was a big move and a big step, so what we did was put in place—it is in the legislation—and built in a review mechanism that would take effect one full cycle after the new donation system was in operation. So one year after a full cycle of the reforms an independent body would conduct a review to have a look at what had worked, what had not worked and what other things could possibly be done. That is due to take place after the next election, and I look forward to that review because I think there are changes that could be made and need to be looked at as part of that donations system. Absolutely these sorts of things can be considered as part of that review, but you do not actually start tweaking a system before it has been able to run its full cycle, because it will have unintended consequences when you start playing around with a system that has not had an opportunity to run its full cycle.

I personally believe that we should be looking at things like caps on individual expenditure. We have seen what is happening with Clive Palmer at the moment, where he is spending an absolute fortune. We need to be looking at these sorts of things. I think there is synergy between truth in political advertising, some of the recommendations that were made in the *Inquiry into the Impact of Social Media on Victorian Elections and Victoria’s Electoral Administration* report and how that links up with some of the third-party activity in donations. I think there are some synergies in that sort of stuff, and I think this independent body can look at those sorts of things. There is some important work that needs to be done, but this was an important reform that was carefully considered; we spent a lot of time on this reform. It took us a number of years—(*Time expired*)

Mr FINN (Western Metropolitan) (15:22): What a joy it was to listen to Mr Tarlamis. Certainly the government put up somebody who knows what they are doing. I think he actually wrote the legislation, so he absolutely knows what he is talking about, and indeed to an uninformed bystander he almost sounded reasonable. But when he talked about transparency, well, I was chortling away to myself, if not guffawing just a tad, because when anybody from this government talks about transparency we know they are having a lend of us, because this government we know will take you to the cleaners at the drop of a hat. They are not big on telling anybody what they are doing, and they will take taxpayers money at the drop of a hat for their own purposes.

We heard Mr Tarlamis tell us about the caps on this and the caps on that: ‘Only \$1000 a year’ and ‘The unions can’t give us any more than the business community does’ and all that. He told us about the caps, but what I want to know is whether the caps include the \$15 million that has gone into employing 154 spin doctors to promote their Big Build program. That is what I would like to know—\$15 million there. Does the cap include the \$80 million—\$80 million of taxpayers money, I might say—that the government is spending on advertising that is grossly political? The Auditor-General has found you with your fingers in the till—

Mr Tarlamis: On a point of order, Acting President, on relevance, I am not sure what relevance that actually has to the motion that is before us.

Mr Ondarchie: On the point of order, Acting President, I remind Mr Tarlamis and others that Mr Tarlamis talked about transparency in his contribution, which absolutely gave Mr Finn the opportunity to talk about transparency in government, which he is doing right now.

Members interjecting.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Bourman): Order! I would like Mr Finn to maybe talk about political donations and stuff. I understand about the transparency thing, but if we took it too far, we could talk about window glazing and stuff like that, so how about just speaking on donations?

Members interjecting.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Bourman): Windows are transparent—you were getting so far off the track.

Mr FINN: I knew a bloke that worked as a window-dresser at Myer once. John-Michael Howson I think was a window-dresser at Myer, wasn't he? A while back.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Bourman): Let us get back on track, Mr Finn.

Mr FINN: To get back to the motion at hand, the fact of the matter is that a great deal of what Mr Tarlamis spoke about was transparency. He said the whole thrust of the donation caps and this motion is about transparency. If you going to talk about transparency, you have got to make sure that it stacks up. As I said a moment ago, I want to know if that transparency allows us to see the \$15 million that they spent on spin doctors and the \$80 million that they spent on advertising.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Bourman): Mr Finn, government expenditure is not part of this. It is about donations and things like that. Let us just keep it on track, please.

Mr FINN: Acting President, I am disappointed that you did not have a similar view when Mr Tarlamis was speaking. He was allowed to speak about transparency, but I am not, and that seems to me to be a little bit odd, a little bit inconsistent. But I am not one to criticise the Chair. As the house would know, I would never do that.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Bourman): I am trying to keep a straight face right now, Mr Finn. Let us just move on.

Mr Ondarchie: On a point of order, Acting President, I draw your attention to item (1) of Mr Hayes's motion today, which I will read to you:

it is critical for public trust in democracy that impartiality in government decision-making not only exists but is seen to exist ...

Mr Finn is going to that in his contribution today about government advertising and lack of impartiality. I think he is quite on point, Chair, and I ask you to review your decision.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Bourman): Reviewed. I am still going to stick to it.

Members interjecting.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Bourman): Would you like me to call the President, Mr Ondarchie?

Mr Ondarchie: I have not asked for that yet.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Bourman): Sorry, I thought you were. Mr Finn, let us keep it going, if we can.

Mr FINN: If you can give me some notes on what I am allowed to say and what I am not allowed to say, that would be a very good thing, because I am going to stick at the motion.

As Mr Ondarchie has said, the first point of Mr Hayes's motion makes it very, very clear that there should be impartiality and indeed it should not just exist but be seen to exist. So what I want to know is: where is our—what is it—\$95 million? I have not even got to the union contribution as yet, because the unions kick in millions of dollars to Labor campaigns, as we know. They might not be in the funds of the ALP. They might not have their own Aldi bag stashed with cash, but they certainly contribute vast sums of money, as we have seen in previous years, to running campaigns in support of the ALP. We have seen that time and time again. I have absolutely no doubt it will happen again in the federal election and again later this year in the state election.

What we have seen in fact with this motion that Mr Tarlamis went on about at very great length is an attempt—I do not know how successful; we will find out in the fullness of time—by the government to nobble the opposition. That is what this government has done, and it is certainly in total contravention of impartiality in government decision-making. It does not exist, and it is seen not to exist. Anybody who knows anything about it will see that. Despite the charm and the smoothness of Mr Tarlamis, the people out there—people listening to this debate today—will know. People listening to this debate today are educated people. They know the scams that the Labor Party pull off. They know what they are like.

Members interjecting.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Bourman): Order! It is getting hard to hear Mr Finn, which is a very unusual thing. Can everyone just keep it down. Mr Finn, as you were.

Mr FINN: Thank you, Acting President. I was just talking about the scams that the Labor Party pull at election times. People out there will understand when I talk about that.

I can certainly sympathise with Mr Hayes's motion. Sadly I cannot vote for it, but I can sympathise with his motives, and they are pure. They are pure motives, unlike Mr Tarlamis's motives—look, he is just devastated. He is just devastated over there, I can see.

Mr Tarlamis: You've broken my heart.

Mr FINN: He is a sensitive new-age man—a SNAG, that is right. He is a sensitive new-age guy over there. And the fact that he wrote the legislation with a pure heart—if you believe that, fair dinkum, you will believe anything. Well, he knows what he has done. He has nobbled the opposition, and he said he is very proud of that, as indeed are the Labor Party—and they gave you your reward, comrade. They gave your reward. And there you are, sitting over there, lording over all, and that has got to be a good thing for you, I am sure.

But we have to come back to this point: if we are going to talk about the transparency of legislation, if we are going to talk about the transparency of our donation caps and so forth, it has got to be a two-way thing. It cannot be just affecting one side of politics. It has got to affect both. Unfortunately at this point in time it is kicking the opposition fair where it should not be kicked, and the government is getting away with murder—not for the first time, I might say. And that is the way they operate. That is the way the Andrews government operates. They will get away with anything that they think they can. They will try it on, and that is what they have done with this legislation. As I say, despite the attempt by Mr Tarlamis to sell us a crook chook, that is the reality. The reality is the reality, and we cannot get away from it.

Ms PATTEN (Northern Metropolitan) (15:32): We know that both of the major parties are able to manipulate legislation and to manipulate the system to their advantage. And I know that I heard Mr Finn crying poor and Mr Tarlamis saying, 'We would never do that'. However, we know both of you take advantage of whatever opportunity you can. It is avoidance, not evasion—is that right? There is that very fine line between what is legal and what is not. So I am happy to lend my support to Mr Hayes. I think the motion picks up on Reason Party policy, and I think probably a lot of us on the crossbench would have similar policies. In fact we did some work on this, and certainly during the debate in the last term we worked with Mr Tarlamis and obviously Mr Jennings on trying to find a pathway forward that did give us the system that we as a community deserve and we want.

We want the public to trust in us, and when the public does not, that is when it is really hard to bring them along with change. And as we saw, the Centre for Public Integrity only two weeks ago released a paper called *Integrity Inadequacies*, and that was particularly focusing on Victoria. They said that our state frameworks were falling short when compared to other jurisdictions. They went on to say that there might be a dinner where Mr Gepp is the lead speaker and people are spending thousands of dollars to hear the wise words of Mr Gepp, but we know that the parma on offer at Mr Gepp's fine

dinner did not cost thousands of dollars. So the difference between the cost of running the event and the fee needs to be explicitly captured as a donation, and I think this is certainly what Mr Hayes was going to in his contribution today and also in his motion. That is actually what New South Wales does. While I certainly think that our legislation would try and capture that, I do not know whether it does adequately. We know that it excludes gifts between registered parties, and I think that is a significant loophole.

We can tighten these donation rules, but I think that the better solution to this problem—and certainly the Centre for Public Integrity concurs—is that we cap election spending. I think that is where we could really disincentivise big donations, disincentivise fundraising, and as Mr Tarlamis knows, that is exactly what I negotiated last term as part of the review. They put an amendment into the Electoral Legislation Amendment Bill 2018 so that a review is to be conducted, and that is to happen after this election. In that is whether the act should be further amended to provide for a cap on political expenditure and, if so, whether the cap should apply generally or to specific persons or entities, and for the value of the cap and the consequences of failure to comply with the cap. That body of work is coming up. After this election we will be looking at that cap, and I think that actually is where we can limit the relevance and maybe the undue influence of donations.

This is from Professor Joo-Cheong Tham from Melbourne Law School, who would also concur:

The absence of limits on election campaign spending in the Victorian legislation risks placing pressure on the “political donation” caps, as parties and candidates seek to meet unabated demand for campaign funds. If the bill had provided for limits on spending, they may have curbed the impact of the uneven flow of private and public funds that will result from its enactment ...

And he went on to talk more about this. I think with the independent review due next year I will find it hard to believe that the expert panel would not come to the same conclusion.

I think Mr Hayes goes to that in his point about Canada, that that is one of the things that Canada does—there is a cap on spending. It is the same in the UK and the same in New Zealand, and this is certainly, I think, the way that we can get meaningful change in this. We can curb the perceived undue influence that donations have in our democratic process.

So I see no problem in broadening the definition of ‘donation’, and I was listening to Mr Tarlamis and watching him shake his head during some of this as well. Yes, they did broaden that definition, and it did capture a number of areas that had not been captured previously. But, as I say, there is going to be an independent review after this election, and I welcome that review. Without being unkind, Mr Hayes, I think that review actually will hopefully go to what you are doing and possibly more than us talking on a Wednesday afternoon, as delightful as it has been to be here for this.

Ms TAYLOR (Southern Metropolitan) (15:39): It is absolutely a delight, isn’t it? Anyway, it has been interesting—that is one way of looking at it. Certainty having integrity with regard to political donations is critical; hence why we introduced the reforms that we made in 2018. But you would almost think, with the underlying premise of some of the comments that have been made in the chamber, that we had not made those significant reforms, and that does take away a little bit of credibility from some of the debate that has been conducted today, because I think that credit should be paid, noting that we do have the strictest political donation laws in the country. I think something has to be said for that, so we do take exception to some of the inferences. It is very easy—and I want to be really careful with the way I say this—to grab a one-liner in a tweet or media commentary and say, ‘Political donations—major parties’. And you might get somewhere with that, relying on people not studying intricately in *Hansard* the debates we have here. I am not saying that the whole of Victoria is not watching the LC debate today, but I dare say they are not. There probably are a few people watching it and I greatly respect that and I hope that they are, because we live stream it for a reason. We do want people to feel they have full access to our chamber.

I think there is no problem at all in debating the issue of political donations, and we heartily encourage that and welcome that debate; however, I do think there is a little bit of a risk when people perhaps do not look at the system as a whole. They cherrypick certain elements, heaven forbid, and thereby create an inference that deviates from the actual factual situation when it comes to how strictly political donations are in fact controlled in Victoria. I just wanted to make that point because, as I say, it is very easy in a one-liner to just sledge the major parties and assume the worst of them without doing a deep dive into actually what is happening in terms of the way political donations are in fact controlled in our state.

I do have a few little rebuttal points here, which I am sure you can appreciate in light of some of the commentary that has been put here. Mr Finn, looking at you has inspired one of the rebuttals, in light of your—

Mr Finn: I inspire a lot of people—

Ms TAYLOR: Well, let us put a few more words. I did not say ‘inspired’. It has inspired me to rebut, so let me be very clear about that. I just want to note that prior to the reforms the Andrews government introduced in 2018 and which the coalition, I might add, opposed, there was no comprehensive Victorian regime for regulating political donations. Donations were instead primarily regulated by the commonwealth regime. So let it be clear when we are being heavily criticised by the opposition that they might want to look back at history and not try to re-create history. I think that is a valid point, and actually looking over at Mr Finn inspired me to go to that issue, so thank you, Mr Finn.

Mr Finn: Twice in the one day.

Ms TAYLOR: Yes, you have assisted me in my rebuttal, so I am very happy about that.

With regard to the commonwealth, if we make a comparison, the commonwealth in fact now has the weakest political donation laws in Australia, with no cap on donations and a high disclosure threshold of \$14 500. This is made worse by the lack of transparency in their system, with the public kept in the dark for at least a year before they can find out which companies and individuals are donating to federal politicians and political parties. So that is the second rebuttal point I want to make with regard to perspective on where Victoria is at versus the commonwealth as a whole, and I wonder to some extent—and I say this respectfully to Mr Hayes—whether a number of your arguments actually pertain perhaps to what is happening federally and not exclusively to Victoria as well. But there is some relevance with issues regarding controls at the commonwealth level.

Victorians can be confident in the integrity of government decision-making when there are strict caps on political donations, which there are. The cap is \$4210 over the course of the four-year electoral cycle, and this is an equaliser in many respects. Why have I raised that issue specifically? Because I know there were comparisons made, respectfully—

Mr Finn interjected.

Ms TAYLOR: No, there is a good reason! There is a rationale, and I am getting to it. I know Mr Hayes has made certain references to New South Wales. I respect that he wants to make a comparator, and that is fair enough in a debate; however, if we are going to make comparisons to New South Wales, let us make an accurate and full and complete comparison, rather than cherrypicking elements which are favourable to a certain argument. I am just putting that out there. So it should be pointed out that whilst Mr Hayes has used the definition of ‘donation’ under the New South Wales Electoral Funding Act 2018 to suggest Victoria should follow suit and include levies and membership fees within the meaning of donation, it is worth noting that these levies and subscriptions are excluded from the cap on donations in New South Wales. And in fact in New South Wales the cap is not over a four-year cycle but rather it is a yearly cap, which is currently \$6700 for the 2021–22 year. So if—and I say this respectfully, Mr Hayes, because we are honouring this debate and we want to make sure it is full and comprehensive—Mr Hayes would like to emulate the New South Wales Electoral

Funding Act, is he also wanting Victoria to increase the caps on donations so that we do not have a \$4210 cap over a four-year cycle but revert to tens of thousands of dollars donated instead, as occurs in New South Wales?

So you can see where I am going with the fact that if you just pluck out certain elements that lend themselves to a certain argument without looking at the whole system of regulation, you are at risk of in fact distorting the actual premise upon which a certain system has been created and the actual ramifications of that system. We are here to have a factual debate, so I think it is fair and reasonable that the government would put these issues on the table so that for those who may be actually watching our debate—and there may be—or down the track *Hansard*—

Mr Finn interjected.

Ms TAYLOR: There will be some. I do not know. I am sure there is somebody out there watching or who may review *Hansard* down the track.

Ms Symes: You're going to get an email now.

Ms TAYLOR: That is right. I hope I do. So this is why I am making the fundamental point that it is important to look at the totality of what each regime achieves. Our government is proud of the Victorian scheme. It places limits on influence through donations, and the fact is that Victorians can see this—this is the other point—in real time. I think that is highly relevant, and they deserve to as well. So I am not trying to resile from that argument—in real time is actually very important in terms of who is donating to whom, so I did want to make that point as well.

To round off my contribution today I also wanted to add further—and I know that Ms Patten did mention the independent panel. We know that the system is not perfect, and we are not saying it cannot be improved. We recognised this in 2018, and this is why we included as part of those reforms a requirement for an independent panel to review the amendments made in 2018 at the end of the full electoral cycle—so following the conclusion of the election in November. I think that is fair and reasonable. It has also allowed a period of time for the system to be rolled out and implemented and to have something to assess, because arguably, if you do not allow a reasonable time frame to assess a system, then what is the point of having the review in the first place? It has to be tested, and we have forecast that well ahead. We have been very transparent in terms of noting that there will be an independent panel assessing the system that is in place, and I think that there should be some credence given to that because it is significant within the context of the debate that we are having today.

Dr CUMMING (Western Metropolitan) (15:48): I do rise today to speak to Sustainable Australia's motion today and to talk about donations and elections and parties. For me as an independent, over my 25 years of running in local councils and for the state, I have used my own money. So I feel that I come from a really different space in this debate—that if it is my money, I have earned it and if I wish to actually go get a loan and I wish to run for council or for state or federally, I should be able to do that because it is my money. I have decided to risk my own money or go get a loan, and I should be able to do that.

But I also extend that to constituents and others within the community. In my mind, there should not be any caps. In my mind all donations should be anonymous, and there could not be then any influence on these parties or individuals. For me, I come from a space where I believe that there should be no caps, that people should be able to spend the money that they want in the manner that they wish to and to give it to whoever they want to for whatever reason they wish to.

For me, I have watched the hypocrisy of some of these parties who say they use volunteers. Now, we all know even from Volunteering Victoria or Volunteering Australia or others that volunteers have a value. Your time is valuable. If you are sitting there at a polling booth from 8 o'clock in the morning to 6 o'clock at night, you have a value. These parties here will talk about minimum wage, and I believe that people should actually be paid for their time. If they are handing out how-to-vote cards, if they

going around letterboxing, they should be paid. It should not be run as a volunteer system. It is ludicrous and it is silly. Who can volunteer time? Normally people who have got plenty of money can volunteer their time or have spare time because they have got a job that pays for that time. I do believe that people's time is valuable, so therefore I believe that there is a value to that, so I believe that during an election everyone should be paid.

For me, as I said, I do not believe in caps. I believe people should be able to spend what they want the way that they want and that donations should be anonymous so therefore there is not any influence. Why I also say that is that it would actually allow our system to be completely transparent. There is no influence when you can actually have a system that runs in that way. So for me, I find the caps that were created at the last election and that we are running under at this moment here in Victoria definitely—definitely, definitely, definitely—advantage the major parties that have been around for decades, if not hundreds of years. They have plenty of money in the bank, and minor parties who are created within these times to come up against them have limited ability because the systems that are in place have actually stopped any kind of minor party really being able to have the amount of money needed for a proper campaign.

For me, during a campaign I have no problem with people being employed—people who are employed in the media, people who are employed here in Victoria to do printing, people here in Victoria who are making T-shirts or making hats. I feel that there would be job creation from that. But unfortunately, when you actually have caps, you have major parties that can actually—and we have seen this with the red shirts and the rorts—use people who are paid in other positions; they are volunteering their time, but they have already got a wage. That is unfair for others within the community who do not have those means. They might have a small amount of means and wish to actually be able to give their money or time to minor parties without feeling that there is a cap but also to do it anonymously so they do not have to declare it and they do not actually have the demonisation that occurs if you come out and say that you are supporting a certain team or a certain party, because unfortunately we live in a society where if you come out with your political views in Victoria you can be demonised within your workforce or workplace. It is one of those topics that are almost taboo when you are at a barbecue. Because of the way we have created this system here in Victoria, the two-party system, our minor parties are feeling hamstrung by the current legislation. They are not able to grow, and independents feel they have not got the means to keep up with the major parties and the war chests that they have.

So, yes, I come from a very different space, Mr Hayes, but I do value that you have actually brought this motion here today for the broader community out there, who might not understand the nuances. And who would read the Victorian Electoral Commission's or the AEC's electoral acts and know that level of detail? I struggle with it. I have seen many a person at IBAC trying to explain it, and they have been in major parties for 20 or 30 years. But I truly believe if we had a system where there were no caps, parties and independents had no idea where their donations came from and we valued everyone who worked during elections and paid them for that, we would have a better election system and better democracy here in Victoria.

Mr ONDARCHIE (Northern Metropolitan) (15:56): I rise to speak to Mr Hayes's motion 735. It relates to democracy and impartiality in government decision-making, which, as Mr Hayes points out, should not only exist but should be seen to exist. I would like to address that first part of the motion today if I can.

I take on notice Mr Tarlams's contribution today where he waxed lyrical about donation laws, about the reforms that have happened in this state and about impartiality and appropriate support for political parties, but I remind him, as per part (1) of today's motion, which talks about democracy and talks about impartiality in government decision-making, of the Auditor-General's finding tabled today about government advertising and whether that government advertising represented part (1) of this

motion, being impartiality in government decision-making. I put to you, Acting President, that in fact it did not. We are asked by this motion to note that:

it is critical for public trust in democracy that impartiality in government decision-making not only exists but is seen to exist ...

There are other parts of this motion which I will get to, but I will deal with them one at a time if I may.

The Auditor-General's report was very clear today that this has been a rort by this government using so-called public information to promote the government. You can say to yourself, 'Is that right? Have they really done that?', but then—the Leader of the Government calls me the king of surveys—they surveyed Victorians to see if those messages were received in a positive manner, if they were favourable. You cannot tell me on the one hand, if we are genuinely about public trust in democracy and impartiality in government decision-making, that they can run these advertisements and then by way of checking see if they have got a favourable response. That is hardly impartiality in government decision-making, and not only did it not exist, it was not seen to exist.

I want to talk a bit more about that, about government impartiality, and I take us back to the period before a state election when there were many people walking around the streets in red shirts that were paid for by the taxpayer—not the red shirts, the time of the staff, who were employees of the Parliament, employees used in government decision-making, who were there to campaign for the Australian Labor Party. I go to part (1) of Mr Hayes's motion, which is about public trust in democracy and impartiality in government decision-making. Where is the impartiality in government decision-making if the Labor Party are employing electorate officers wearing red shirts to campaign for the government? It was an absolute rort—

Mr Finn interjected.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Bourman): Thank you, Mr Finn. Mr Ondarchie, you are kind of sailing close to the wind. As you are not the lead speaker, you do not have the same leeway—

Mr Finn: You didn't give me the leeway. What are you talking about?

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Bourman): I will get to that after this. Basically, if you can keep it related to donations and so on.

Mr ONDARCHIE: On a point of order, Acting President, part (1) of Mr Hayes's motion does not talk about donations at all. I am only dealing with part (1) of the motion. I am talking about public trust in democracy and government decision-making. It does not talk about donations at all. I am only dealing with part (1) of the motion so far. I will get to the other parts as my contribution comes along.

Sitting suspended 4.00 pm until 4.18 pm.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Bourman): I am going to rule on Mr Ondarchie's point of order. I am actually going to uphold it.

Mr ONDARCHIE: Thank you, Acting President. As I was saying, before we were interrupted, on part (1) of Mr Hayes's motion, which talks about public trust in democracy and impartiality in government decision-making not only existing but being seen to exist, if we are genuine about having impartiality in government decision-making, then the red shirts thing should never have occurred—it should never have happened—where they used taxpayer-funded employees to campaign for the Labor Party. So I concur with what Mr Hayes is saying here about public trust in democracy and government decision-making.

Interestingly enough the Labor Party then paid back the \$388 000 they spent of taxpayers money and said, 'Well, everything must be fine now'. We have met the hurdle that Mr Hayes is talking about here because public trust was seen to be repaid—because 'We paid \$388 000'. But for me, that is a bit like somebody stealing your car, bringing it back a month later when they are caught and going, 'Here you

go, you got your car back; we're all square now'. No, the crime still happened. They still stole money from the taxpayer, and simply paying it back does not absolve them of their responsibilities or their accountability for this.

So further to Mr Hayes's first point—and I am hopeful with the time allowed I will get to his other points in the motion today—today the Victorian Auditor-General's Office released a report that found that Victorian taxpayer-funded ads breached the law. Given that the Auditor-General has found that two taxpayer-funded advertising campaigns worth more than \$13 million were political and did not comply with the state laws, the Labor Party, following their example with the red shirts, should be paying back that money. They should be paying back the \$13 million they spent on political advertising that was camouflaged as part of a taxpayer-funded advertising campaign to inform people.

The Victorian Auditor-General's report released today ruled on parts of the state's Big Build advertising program. The 2019 Our Fair Share campaign, it says, was in breach of current laws. An article on it says:

In 2017 the ... parliament passed laws to stop public sector agencies from publishing political advertising by ensuring it was always in the public interest.

The Our Fair Share (OFS) campaign—which ran from April to June 2019 and cost taxpayers \$1.7m—advocated for more Commonwealth funding for Victoria.

But the VAGO report found most of that campaign was political because it could “easily be seen” to promote the current Victorian government while attacking the federal government.

It also found the OFS advertisements, which featured on TV during the 2019 commonwealth election campaign, did more than just state facts and data about government funding.

I quote from the report:

The statements about the Victorian government appeared to have a positive tone. They referred to billions of dollars or ‘record levels’ of investment. The statements about ‘Canberra’ were negative. They used language such as ‘cuts’ and ‘miss out’.

Further, the report says:

Members of the public were likely to find the language in some of the advertisements to be particularly emotive. One of the television advertisements included the line ‘don't let Canberra short-change our kids’.

But do you know what? The government will stand up today and say they were doing their job, but they were clearly using taxpayers money to run a Labor Party campaign, just as they did with the red shirts.

I think it is reasonable that Leader of the Opposition Matthew Guy has called on the Labor Party to pay back the money. They have got form on this. They got caught on the red shirts rort—\$388 000 of taxpayers money used to campaign for the Labor Party. Today we found that an advertising campaign that cost \$13 million was political and did not comply with the state laws. How about you give us the money back? How about you give the taxpayer the money back, Labor Party? That does not absolve you from your responsibility, I have to say. It does not absolve you of the exact point that Mr Hayes has made in point (1) of his motion today, which is that:

it is critical for public trust in democracy that impartiality in government decision-making not only exists but is seen to exist ...

Government, I call on you today: if you are genuine about transparency, as Mr Tarlamis said, integrity, as Mr Tarlamis said, and accountability, as Mr Tarlamis said, then it is incumbent on you to pay back the money you stole from the taxpayers to run an advertising campaign—it is incumbent upon you. I call on Daniel Andrews today: if he has one iota of integrity—there are some people who say he does not—then he should pay back that money via the Australian Labor Party.

I know that this is political advertising, because they did a survey afterwards and included a question about whether the ads made people feel positive about the government. They ran a campaign and then

asked people, ‘Do you feel good about what your government are doing?’. This is complete spending of taxpayers money to promote the Australian Labor Party in Victoria. It is a rort, and it stands alongside many other rorts that occur in this state. Quite simply, I and, I suspect, Mr Hayes are sick and tired of this sort of stuff. So I commend point (1) of Mr Hayes’s motion today. We need to see better public trust in democracy. We need to ensure the impartiality in government decision-making not only occurs but is seen to occur as well.

The survey also talked about the coordinated master plan and asked how that master plan made people feel good about the government. It was an absolute rort with the red shirts, and it was an absolute rort with this advertising campaign. Sadly, I have run out of time, but I will have more to say at another time.

Mr MEDDICK (Western Victoria) (16:24): I want to say at the outset that I do recognise that Victoria has made great strides in this area. Other jurisdictions around Australia are also doing the same. I take up Ms Taylor’s comments that we should be looking at this legislation as a whole. I do get that, and I do like to do that, but it does not mean that we cannot also then look at the individual aspects where we think they might need tightening up, because when we do that we do make the legislation better.

I also want to take up something that the Acting President, Ms Patten, said: that it kind of feels like Mum and Dad fighting; it very much feels like that during this debate. I liken this to—I hate this terminology, but everyone talks about it—things passing the pub test. If we were going to go into a pub and ask what people thought, I think they would say that both the major parties should not even be allowed to be discussing this topic and it should be left to the crossbench to decide this motion on their own, because they have been guilty of it on all sides. Whether that is a fact or not, that is the perception or what is out in the community, that both sides have engaged in or been the recipients of funding perhaps from dodgy areas at different points in time.

That being said, from the beginning what Mr Hayes is proposing here is not a call to halt or prevent in any way legitimate donations to any political party. He is not seeking to prevent any citizen from exercising their right to financially support a party that aligns with their beliefs and their values. He is seeking to prevent large corporations and businesses from benefiting from donations by receiving large, profitable government contracts, no matter who the government of the day is, as a reward for those donations. He seeks to remove clear conflicts of interest, and that is in the public interest. He is, when we boil this motion down to the fundamental concerns it seeks to rectify, trying to ensure some very important, noble and obvious outcomes that seem to be a matter of common sense to the overall population.

Mr Hayes’s motion in part seeks to make transparent where and who these donations come from. In a disturbingly large number of cases just who is making donations is hidden. They are hidden behind, in stock market parlance, shelf companies—foundations, usually with a high-profile political figure as their patron, selling high-priced tickets to gala dinners and functions. And lo, some time later, a donation of gargantuan proportions is made by that foundation to either that politician’s campaign or their party, cynically hidden from a public that only sees a foundation making the donation and assumes a charity of some sort has done this. In this way the donation coming from a favoured contractor or beneficiary of a government contract or enormous grant is deliberately hidden. It is literally a case of someone attending, paying a few thousand for a table and a dinner and, during the event, a few thousand more and being rewarded with a government grant or contract worth in the millions later down the track. These behind-the-curtain practices are part of the reason the public has so little trust in governments of all colours.

Another, as I said earlier, is the awarding of contracts. I have no issue with the donor making a donation, but it should also be immediately transparent and listed on a public website within 24 hours. One could make the case, as many members of the public do, that donating should exclude companies from the tender process. That is probably the subject of what I would wager would be a rather large

and messy inquiry. In fact I would argue that this clarity in the flow of money should also work in the opposite direction: taxpayer funds should not flow from government to organisations such as religious organisations via lucrative tax breaks and direct gifts of tens of millions to a politician's chosen faith or to their pet media organisations. Those two should stop immediately, because they are simply vote-buying processes.

Mr Hayes's motion also seeks to broaden the definition of 'donations' to include much of what I have spoken about and more. In so doing he seeks to fundamentally make the entire process completely transparent so that all members of the public will know exactly how much has been given and by exactly who, with publication of all levels of where that donation came from. Unfortunately much of what Mr Hayes seeks to accomplish here I suspect will not only fall within the control of this state government and other state governments but also foray into the clutches of the federal sphere. Where this is the case, it does not at all lessen the intentions of what he is trying to accomplish, and I support his intentions, as I support his motion.

Dr KIEU (South Eastern Metropolitan) (16:30): I rise to speak to the motion put by Mr Hayes. Essentially this is a motion about donations. It has been taken very far afield, but let me be strict and restrain myself to the donations domain. We all agree on the principles of transparency and accountability, but I will have to point out some of the inaccuracies in the motion put up by Mr Hayes.

First of all, it is not true that Victoria has the weakest donation laws. As a matter of fact, it has the strongest in the country. Look at the commonwealth, for example. The donation laws for the commonwealth are in fact very weak, actually weaker than all the states. It has a very high disclosure threshold of \$14 500. Also, because of the lack of transparency in the system, the public will not be notified of the donors for at least a year, and only after that can the public find out which companies or which individuals have donated to the federal politicians.

Also, look at some of the cases—the very high profile case of the Honourable Christian Porter about the lack of disclosure of the donations to his fund for fighting a matter in court. Look at New South Wales: in New South Wales there is a yearly cap currently at \$6700 for this 2021–22 year. For each year, \$6700, and over a cycle of four years for every state election cycle that would amount to \$26 800. Compare that—both the federal and the New South Wales cases—to our cap on donations: we have a cap on donations of a maximum of \$4000. Sorry, we have to be precise, because of inflation and everything—\$4210 per year, taking into account inflation, for this particular year of the election. Compare that to \$26 800 over four years. Compare that to—let me get the number correctly—\$14 500 per year for a federal MP. Also, in the state of Victoria there is a cap of \$1050—I suspect the \$50 is due to inflation and also to the creeping—on anonymous donations, and any failure to disclose those donations above the limit will result in penalties. Currently it is 300 penalty units, which is approximately \$54 000, and/or imprisonment of up to two years. Any scheme to avoid that will also result in offences, and the maximum penalty for those offences currently is 10 years imprisonment. More than that, not only is the amount capped and the lowest in the country, but also the disclosure has to be made in real time, not one year delayed as is the case for the donation law for federal Parliament MPs.

But there is no perfect system, I believe, that cannot be improved upon. The government recognised that, so in the year leading up to the last election, 2018, we had a review and implemented some of the new regulations and the cap.

That has demonstrated our commitment to donations reforms, and that commitment and the reforms are the most substantial donations reforms in the history of Victoria—and that was in the year 2018. We are also committing to further consideration of any further reforms once the 2018 laws have been tested over one electoral cycle, and we are committed to a review and an independent panel to be appointed for that review following this year's election in 2022. And the review by the panel, if we are re-elected, will institute, as soon as possible, those recommendations.

It is also the case that in Mr Hayes's motion we disagree with the interpretation of what constitutes a gift. Mr Hayes, I have to point out, is incorrect in his assertion that donations made through attendance at party fundraisers are not currently categorised as gifts. In fact the Electoral Act 2002 explicitly stipulates that 'the making of a payment or contribution at a fundraising function' is considered a gift.

The motion also seeks to broaden the definition of 'donations' to include income from corporate sponsorship of business forums, annual levies and membership fees over \$1000. First of all, about the annual membership fees and levies, the Electoral Act excludes these payments from being considered or being defined as gifts when they are made to just the political parties. Why? Because a membership to a registered political party is paid in exchange for the rights of the members, such as the rights of voting, of meeting and of contributing to their chosen political party. It is not a donation. There is adequate consideration provided in exchange for the membership, and this is not a gift either. Similarly, the annual levies paid to registered political parties by elected representatives or their staff and the staff who work for political parties should be excluded and are excluded because these payments simply are not gifts.

So when we consider the operation of the regime it is important to consider the operation of the entire scheme rather than just the definition of 'gifts or political donations', including the requirements around the use of political expenditure and the state campaign accounts, for example. For all the Labor members, including me, all the donations that are received must be paid into a state campaign account—in my case, Tien Kieu, South Eastern Metropolitan—and then all the expenditure that I spend for election by promoting myself or opposing a candidate of another political party must be paid from that state campaign account. And it is stipulated that the money from that account cannot be used for political expenditure.

I have 14 seconds left. I just want to summarise that the government has demonstrated our commitment to transparency and accountability and also donations reforms, and we will have an independent panel to review the donations after this election cycle, after 2022.

Mr BARTON (Eastern Metropolitan) (16:40): I rise to speak on Mr Hayes's motion 735 on political donations. This motion seeks to acknowledge the importance of transparency and accountability in the process of making and accepting political donations. Absolutely the political donation process influences public trust as well as our Victorian democracy as a whole. We know that these donations can often be made with the intention of persuading a certain viewpoint or receiving something in return. This can create many issues when it comes to matters of fairness, private use of taxpayers money and what the best outcome is for the community.

I agree with Mr Hayes that it is critical for public trust in democracy that there is impartiality in government decision-making. I also agree we should consistently be reviewing and examining our donation laws to ensure public trust can be upheld. However, this should be achieved in a way that does not create unnecessary, impractical and overly burdensome reporting processes. Yes, there are certain issues when it comes to charging fees for attending party fundraisers that are far beyond the costs of running the event, though if this is a small sum, say \$10, it would be unrealistic to expect hundreds of these small-sum donations to be recorded and stored for future tallies.

In Victoria we are lucky to have some of the strictest laws on political donations. Donations are restricted and capped, there can be no foreign donations and domestic donations are limited to a maximum of \$4100 every four years. Every donation over \$1000 must be disclosed to the public. The Victorian Electoral Commission must also be informed of any donation within one month of receipt of it. Absolutely these laws have increased transparency and prevented outside influence on political decision making.

As with all policy, donation laws are a work in progress and loopholes will have to be continuously reviewed and reformed. I support the further examining of the definition of 'donation' as proposed by

this motion and look forward to hearing my colleagues' views on this proposal. I will be supporting this motion.

Mr HAYES (Southern Metropolitan) (16:43): First of all, going to what Mr Tarlamis said—which was a very good contribution—the 2018 reforms were a good start, a very good start, and timely reporting is good and bans on foreign donations are good, but the definitions could be improved. The definitions still omit membership fees and ticketed fundraising, and that is a huge issue. It is what is actually claimed that has to be reported out of this ticketed fundraising; it is not just the giveaways there, it is the actual price of the ticket too. An annual return is good, but it does not break down ticketed events, only reports the whole donation.

I am very happy to hear about the review in 2022. I am glad it has been legislated, but we should be fixing loopholes all the time. When it comes to talking about the Canadian and New South Wales systems, I was not talking about importing the whole damn lot, just the good components of it—you know, really! And if there is not an issue with what is here, why are all three integrity groups saying that there are issues to do with it? I agree with Ms Patten: the difference in the ticketed price has to be identified and reported. Election spending caps—I am not arguing about what price the caps should be at, but there should be caps. We do have them, but they are not the total issue. *(Time expired)*

House divided on motion:

Ayes, 10

Barton, Mr
Bourman, Mr
Grimley, Mr
Hayes, Mr

Limbrick, Mr
Maxwell, Ms
Meddick, Mr

Patten, Ms
Quilty, Mr
Vaghela, Ms

Noes, 24

Atkinson, Mr
Bath, Ms
Burnett-Wake, Ms
Crozier, Ms
Cumming, Dr
Davis, Mr
Elasmar, Mr
Erdogan, Mr

Finn, Mr
Gepp, Mr
Kieu, Dr
Leane, Mr
Lovell, Ms
McArthur, Mrs
Melhem, Mr
Ondarchie, Mr

Pulford, Ms
Rich-Phillips, Mr
Shing, Ms
Symes, Ms
Tarlamis, Mr
Taylor, Ms
Tierney, Ms
Watt, Ms

Motion negatived.

Business of the house

NOTICES OF MOTION AND ORDERS OF THE DAY

Mr FINN (Western Metropolitan) (16:51): I move:

That the consideration of the remaining notices of motion and orders of the day, general business, be postponed until the next day of meeting.

Motion agreed to.

Statements on reports, papers and petitions

MEDICINAL CANNABIS

Petition

Ms PATTEN (Northern Metropolitan) (16:51): I rise to speak about the petition that was tabled in this house just yesterday—a petition calling for a review of roadside cannabis testing laws. This is about equality. This is about the 172 000 patients who have been prescribed medicinal cannabis. All they are asking for is equal driving rights. All they are asking for is that they be allowed to have a complete defence for the presence of THC in their oral fluid or blood when they have a valid doctors

prescription for a product, when the nature of their offending does not involve dangerous or reckless driving and when the officer cannot establish reasonable grounds to suspect driver impairment.

I know everyone in this chamber knows someone who is using medicinal cannabis, and probably they have told you that it has helped them sleep better, that it has helped remove the pain, that it has helped them get their lives back, because this medicine has helped, as I say, over 100 000 people and growing. The numbers are growing. The products are growing. The range of symptoms that it can affect is growing as well.

We are not saying that if someone is impaired they should be allowed to drive. We are just saying that if people have been prescribed a legal prescription medication and can drive safely, then they should be allowed to do so. We allow people to drive when they have prescriptions for opioids. We allow people to drive when they have prescriptions for benzodiazepines. We ask them not to drive if they are feeling impaired. Their doctors provide them with that evidence that they should not drive if they are feeling impaired, and that is all the hundreds and thousands of medicinal cannabis patients are asking for.

In Victoria we were the first state to legalise medicinal cannabis. We were progressive. We set the pace for the rest of the country to follow in our steps. We also set a medicinal cannabis industry plan. We set targets and strategies for how we were going to build a medicinal cannabis industry in Victoria, and then we put the complete brakes on it by saying that medicinal cannabis patients must be treated differently to all other patients. It is just not fair. It is not right. It is not based in science. It is not based in evidence.

We have seen other jurisdictions, like that radical place, Tasmania, where they have a defence. And, guess what, since medicinal cannabis was legalised in Tasmania there has not been an increase in road deaths, there has not been an increase in people driving impaired, but it has meant that people who get great relief from this medicine are allowed to do that.

Let us just remember who we are talking about. The average age of a medicinal cannabis patient is 52; they are female. So that is a 52-year-old woman—not actually very high up in our driving fatality statistics, not even very high up in our road incident statistics. Many of us have been talking about endometriosis in recent weeks; many of the endometriosis patients are finding great relief from medicinal cannabis. I spoke to one just the other day, and she said, ‘I can only use it when I’m on holidays’. So it is only when she is on holidays that she gets the relief that that medicine can provide for her.

This petition is asking for a trial. It is not asking for anything radical. In fact Australia is one of the only jurisdictions that prohibits medicinal cannabis patients from driving when it is safe to do so. We are pretty much the only jurisdiction. So this petition is asking the government to allow for a trial, to allow for those patients who have a valid prescription from their doctor to be allowed to drive when they are not impaired. I do not think that is too much to ask.

DEPARTMENT OF TREASURY AND FINANCE

Budget papers 2021–22

Mr GEPP (Northern Victoria) (16:56): I rise to make a statement about the budget 2021–22. In particular I want to address the Big Housing Build that was announced through the budget. Of course a couple of weeks ago we had a bit of a debate in this place about homelessness and social housing, and what we heard during that debate were some breathtaking contributions, and one in particular. It came from the Liberal Party, and when you go back and you have a read of what the Liberal Party said during the course of that debate, you can only draw one conclusion—that is, that their social housing policy going to the election is based around segregation and a bigoted response to this very important area of public policy. It is elitist. It is postcode snobbery. In fact they advanced the view in this place during that debate that whether or not you could have residency in a particular postcode if

social housing existed in that postcode depended upon the standard of shoe—‘sneaker’, I think was the term used—and whether or not you had the latest iPhone. If you did not, then your kids could not possibly mix with kids in a particular neighbourhood who might have a more expensive, more well known brand of sneaker.

Of course the public commentary since that debate has been very, very telling. It is not me or anybody on this side of the house making this stuff up. People who objectively looked at that debate formed their own views, including Stuart Allen, the director of the Homeless Project, a not-for-profit that is based here in Melbourne. His assessment of the Liberal Party’s position stated in that debate was that it is out of touch and that a model which integrates affordable housing in socio-economically different suburbs had proved more successful than separation. I quote:

The British tried segregation some years ago, where they basically tried to separate the poor and marginalised in high rise units separate to London, giving them their own suburb ...

We realised that just simply creates ghettos. The Australian model seems to work quite well with interspersed public housing in prominent suburbs like South Yarra in Williamstown, and Melbourne.

His assessment? ‘We should continue with it’.

I have had many, many constituents during the course of the last sitting week and this sitting week reach out from my electorate of Northern Victoria condemning the Liberal Party for the position that they put during that debate. They are clearly not understanding the needs of people who are in the situation where they rely on social housing to be able to improve their livability. Clearly the ignorance shown by the Liberal Party, and in particular Ms Lovell, who was their spokesperson on that particular day, has not gone unnoticed in Northern Victoria, and nor should it.

The other thing that has not gone unnoticed is the lack of condemnation by the Leader of the Liberal Party. He described the contribution—get this—as ‘clumsy’.

Ms Shing: But well intentioned.

Mr GEPP: Well intentioned but clumsy. I actually say to Mr Guy, it was not clumsy, it was not well intentioned; it was bigoted, it was segregationist, it was separatist, it was snobbery and it came from somebody who formerly occupied the position of housing minister in this state, someone who should know better. But she has got form, because back in 2010 she was part of a campaign where there was a development for housing going on in Bentleigh for displaced women. She was leading the charge to ensure that that did not occur. But then of course when they won the election, who do you reckon turned up in the white car and cut the ribbon? She had the audacity to campaign against this development and then turned up in the big white car and cut the ribbon, and all smiles. Well, shame on you and shame on Matthew Guy. He needs to come out and condemn the contribution not as clumsy but as a bigoted, segregationist, separatist response to an important public policy debate. He needs to put on the record that he will not support any member of the Liberal Party who holds such views, and he needs to clearly enunciate what the Liberal Party’s policy is going into the next election, because right now it stinks.

DEPARTMENT OF TREASURY AND FINANCE

Budget papers 2021–22

Ms LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (17:02): I rise to speak on the budget 2021–22. I rise to speak particularly on the portion of the budget that raises the funding for Parks Victoria and for the Barmah forest. The issue that I want to raise on behalf of my constituents, who are extremely concerned about this, is the trapping of brumbies that is going on in the Barmah at the moment. Constituents are coming to me complaining about the inhumane practices of the Andrews Labor government with the trapping. In fact just this afternoon I received an email from someone who had witnessed two mares who were heavily in foal who had been trapped. These are horses that had never been handled before. They were trapped in the traps. Then of course Parks Victoria people come out and load them onto a truck and

take them off to be rehomed. But for these particular mares that were heavily in foal, this would be a really traumatic experience. They have never been handled before. Suddenly they are caught in a trap, they are sent off on a truck and they are put in extreme trauma.

There has not been a count done of the brumbies in the Barmah forest in recent times. Locals are very concerned about the amount of brumbies that are being taken out of the forest, because the count has not been done in order to establish how many horses there actually are there in the forest. I call the minister to immediately stop the trapping of the Barmah brumbies and to instead conduct a proper headcount. The last headcount that was done we know was inaccurate. It was taken in a spot in the forest where the horses were coming to drink and to feed and then multiplied out across the forest. It was completely inaccurate. It was way over the top on the numbers that were portrayed as being in the forest. There needs to be an accurate count done and there needs to be a stop to all of the trapping of brumbies in the Barmah until this count is conducted.

ELECTORAL MATTERS COMMITTEE

Inquiry into Whether Victoria Should Participate in a National Electoral Roll Platform

Dr CUMMING (Western Metropolitan) (17:04): I rise to speak on the report on the inquiry into whether Victoria should participate in a national electoral roll platform. This is a very short report with only five findings and four recommendations. I am by no means downplaying the work of the committee, but in some ways the report is probably a little premature. The national electoral roll platform is still in concept phase, so until such time as a software design and governance arrangements are finalised a decision to move to a national platform cannot be made.

It was interesting to see that Victoria and Western Australia are the only two states that maintain their own register of enrolled voters. All other states and territories rely on the Australian Electoral Commission register for state and local council elections. Now, several things in the report are of concern to me, firstly that the Electoral Act 2002 lacks clarity about the data that can be stored in the register and the Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC) has not disclosed the full details of the data that it stores. Since members of Parliament and political parties are provided with this information, I think it is important that everyone is aware of exactly what data is being stored, so I am happy to see the recommendation that the act should specify what data must and may be stored for each elector. The report quotes the ACT's Electoral Act 1992 and particulars that must or may be contained in the roll. Now, I think we need to be very cautious in what information we do store. Always, no matter what regulations are put in place, the information can get into the wrong hands, to enable someone to find a partner or a victim and subject them to further abuse. We need to make sure that the information that is collected is essential to the electoral roll, not information collected for marketing purposes.

That brings me to my second point of concern, and that is the disclosure of information. The act gives the VEC the discretion to provide a list of electors and their particulars to any person or organisation on request. They can only do so if:

... the public interest in providing the ... information outweighs the public interest in protecting the privacy of personal information in the particular circumstances.

In the last year the data was provided to the Adoption Information Service, the Victorian Assisted Reproductive Treatment Authority and BreastScreen, amongst others. Previously it has been only provided to the Cancer Council and Anglicare. Now, while I see certainly some benefits in providing it to BreastScreen and the Cancer Council, I do question the use of the electoral roll by other organisations for what I can only assume could possibly be marketing purposes. Again, this opens the possibility of information getting into the wrong hands.

There is another matter that I would like to add for consideration regarding the electoral roll, and that is proof of identity when voting. We all know that some people move from booth to booth, voting under different names. This needs to stop. ID should be provided when you vote and before you get your ballot paper.

I hope that the government accepts the recommendations of the report and makes the necessary changes to the Electoral Act, but I hope that they also seriously consider what data is collected and who can have access to that data, that they make it safe and that rather than paying lip-service to this report they go ahead, do some actions and make moves towards looking at a fairer system here in Victoria, which I believe is providing your proof of ID when you vote.

Mr Davis: On a point of order, Acting President, I notice a new and different approach has been adopted to the list of the reports tonight, and the new and different approach seems to be that the President has adopted the list as it is put on the blue. That has never been the case previously. If it is a new change, the President perhaps needs to announce that, that is all. That has worked to the significant disadvantage of some in the chamber.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Ms Patten): Thanks, Mr Davis. This was under instruction from the President, so we will take it on notice and we will raise it with the President and get him to give a ruling tomorrow.

Dr CUMMING: Acting President, for me, who has pretty much every Wednesday spoken on a report, it is not always the case that we go by the daily blue. I normally a week in advance am sent a list, so I do not understand the opposition's problem.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Ms Patten): Thank you, Dr Cumming.

ECONOMY AND INFRASTRUCTURE COMMITTEE

Inquiry into the Multi Purpose Taxi Program

Mr BARTON (Eastern Metropolitan) (17:10): I rise to speak on the Economy and Infrastructure Committee's report on the inquiry into the multipurpose taxi program. The failures of Commercial Passenger Vehicles Victoria outlined are no surprise to the industry. In January 2021, in the middle of the pandemic, the CPVV made the decision to extend the multipurpose taxi program to accommodate Uber—not everybody else, just Uber. For years taxis had delivered the multipurpose taxi program, undertaking training that allows drivers to transport vulnerable groups—proper training, not click and check on a website. This is a program that has long been built on trust, flexibility and safety. This is about those with disabilities having a relationship with their driver. I began this inquiry because I believed that both the taxi industry and those people with disabilities deserved to understand the reasons behind this decision. The hearings and the report have shown that there were in fact no merits, and both Uber and the CPVV resisted explaining their decision-making at every turn. In fact we are in VCAT seeking more documents about these matters.

Putting wheelchair-accessible vehicles on the road is expensive and in many cases financially unviable. We know this because Uber has trialled operating wheelchair-accessible vehicles and found it not profitable. We know this because taxidriver and operators throughout Victoria have been begging for assistance to keep this essential service on the road. During the inquiry we learned a lot about cross-subsidisation. What this means in the industry is that wheelchair-accessible taxi services can only be provided by an operator if they are cross-subsidised by work that is somewhat more profitable than normal taxi work. The problem with what the regulator has done is that they did not do the work on the impact of opening up the multipurpose taxi program to another 80 000 vehicles. We heard from taxi operators that this meant it became that much harder to keep wheelchair-accessible vehicles on the road, with many operators already removing their vehicles because they could not continue running at a loss.

Unfortunately, despite the CPVV being the industry regulator, it is made clear in finding 9 in this report that they have no idea how many wheelchair-accessible vehicles are active in Victoria or if they are based in regional or metro areas. In fact you can say that for the entire industry. The committee found that the CPVV is likely unaware of how critical aspects of the multipurpose taxi program are functioning. This was made clear through many, many data errors as well as different numbers being

provided and information that, once found false, had to be redacted. Data management by the CPVV has been a disaster, and this is nothing new. I was pleased to see recommendation 1 of the report be that the CPVV address their ongoing data management issues and report to the Minister for Public Transport within six months on their weaknesses and remedies.

Another appalling discovery in this inquiry was the misinformation and manipulative use of information regarding the multipurpose taxi program trial in Geelong. For Uber, this was undertaken before the extension. While it was initially claimed that only four people took part in this trial and 500 people were sent invitations to take part, we later found out that in actual fact six people took part in the trial. There has been no justification by either the CPVV or Uber about why these two individuals were left out of the survey process or the freedom-of-information requests, but we can say we know why it is: because one of them was highly critical of the service, although we can certainly read between the lines.

Finding 4 of the report states that for the trial assessing user experience six participants is not suitable and a larger participant pool would be required. Another important recommendation is for the government to raise the lifting fee for the wheelchair-accessible vehicles to encourage existing operators to continue as part of the multipurpose taxi program. If adopted, this would make a significant difference and ensure that Victoria's most vulnerable can access a wheelchair-accessible vehicle in their community.

Safety was a theme consistently brought up during this inquiry. The report rightly recommends that all drivers operating in the multipurpose taxi program install a compliant security camera, cameras only taxis have now, and the government implement a consistent set of minimum vehicle safety standards and requirements for those in the program to combat— (*Time expired*)

ECONOMY AND INFRASTRUCTURE COMMITTEE

Inquiry into the Multi Purpose Taxi Program

Mr MEDDICK (Western Victoria) (17:15): I am pleased to speak to this report, and I thank Mr Barton for not only instigating this inquiry but his unwavering tenacity on behalf of all those that are still battling to eke out a living in this industry. I had particular interest in this inquiry as my mother- and father-in-law were both wheelchair-accessible vehicle (WAV) drivers in Geelong. I watched and admired the special relationships they had with their clients—relationships based on mutual trust and respect, something that could only be built over time and with continually having that person to safely take you from one place to another and back again over years.

The rideshare industry has no regard for that relationship. Their only concern is the quickest way to make the quickest buck out of some of our most vulnerable citizens. That is not my assumption; that is their own admission. They want to cherry-pick the client base and take only the fares that WAVs rely on between the wheelchair fares to make their service viable. They want to keep training in house only. They do not want cameras in their cars. They want to apply surge pricing to handicapped clients on fixed incomes, people on disability support pensions and the like. Their behaviour is akin to Ebenezer Scrooge evicting the orphans from the orphanage to stand in the snow in below-freezing temperatures.

This inquiry exposed the rideshare industry for what it is and also laid bare the mind-boggling inadequacies of Commercial Passenger Vehicles Victoria. There is no clearer example of this than the sham of a trial on not just the suitability of Uber's technology for the scheme but also participant experience. One might expect that such a trial, particularly with participants, would be extensive, would be broad in its trial group, taking into study all types of users. But no, it was a trial of only six users conducted in Geelong that also only took place over 11 days—absolutely appalling.

Thankfully recommendation 3 insists upon a true and comprehensive survey. Recommendation 11 insists that all participating vehicles must have security cameras installed. Recommendation 12 is that

minimum safety and accessibility requirements for vehicles be implemented. Recommendation 14 deals specifically with preventing Uber from ripping off vulnerable people by introducing a maximum fare no greater than that set by the Essential Services Commission.

I know that many in the community have been concerned about personal safety; driver identification and authenticity; and assaults, including sexual assaults, committed by rideshare drivers. This was highlighted in New South Wales, where there were around 500 offences committed in a short period. So it is pleasing to see that recommendation 20 states that the government will require all Uber drivers participating in the scheme to undergo an NDIS worker screening check in line with other industries, under the *Victorian Safety Screening Policy*.

This is a damning report exposing a number of failings, but the recommendations allow for significant improvement, and I have touched on just a few. I want to thank the secretariat for their hard work and diligence, and I thank the chair, Mr Erdogan, for his patience. Mr Barton and I were adamant, we were forceful and we were sometimes downright belligerent on many sections of this inquiry. But I make no apology for that. As I said, these vulnerable Victorians deserve far better than what was going to be served up to them.

This report actually only scratches the surface. There is far more to be done, as I am sure Mr Barton will agree and will continue to push for. I was pleased to participate to fight for those that need it, and I sincerely hope the government implements the recommendations in full, commits to a far deeper dive into this matter and delivers a fairer, safer service for all.

TIMBER INDUSTRY

Petition

Mrs McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (17:20): This morning I was proud to table e-petition 406, which calls for the amendment of the *Victorian Forestry Plan*. Taken together with the paper petition to the same effect, it includes 893 signatories and represents an extraordinary effort by the petition originator, James Kidman. I visited James and his father, Murray, who together run Otway Tonewoods and who source and prepare fabulous Otway woods. Much goes to Melbourne-based Maton Guitars, whose instruments are renowned at home and abroad and whose customers include many world-famous musicians. Limited quantities of their carefully selected high-grade local blackwood, satinwood and mountain ash go to other equally skilled low-volume Victorian crafters who fashion other truly extraordinary musical instruments. Seeing their operation and listening to the way they work, I was appalled at the threat that the *Victorian Forestry Plan*'s ban on native timber harvesting would stop their operations and instead force the environmentally unfriendly importation of inferior timber from distant parts of the world with much lower ecological standards. It would destroy the knowledge of generations and amount to cultural as well as economic vandalism.

I acknowledge that the pressure brought to bear by James and others through this petition has averted some of this danger, and I am delighted by the government climb-down, which has now confirmed that the forest produce licence system will remain for some extremely low-volume supply of specialty timbers. This only represents a fraction of the overall industry, however, and the petition I presented today identifies a much greater problem.

I have always been a strong advocate for the forest industry—for the livelihoods provided, for the regional economies supported, for the high-quality local timber resource produced and for their essential firefighting efforts. But I am grateful to James for explaining to me in significant detail the scientific evidence and the ecological and environmental arguments for sustainable forestry. These operations are as far from bare deforestation, denuded landscapes and the exploited earth as you can possibly imagine. When this government seek the votes of urban environmentalists, conjuring up

images of Brazilian rainforest-style logging operations, they are dishonestly and emotively exploiting ignorance, not pursuing science-led policy to improve forest ecology. As the petition states:

Contemporary ecologically sustainable timber harvesting is being blamed for detrimental ecological legacies of wildfire, past land clearing, invasive species and historical harvesting.

The fact is that locking up forests and throwing away the key is the very opposite of environmentally friendly. The petition continues:

... contemporary timber harvesting is a valuable tool that creates mosaic disturbances—increasing species richness, biodiversity and ecosystem resilience.

The idea that disturbance is devastating is simply wrong. It ignores the science as well as maligning the motives of those involved in the Victorian native timber industry. Ecological thinning can be a positive benefit to ecosystems. It promotes greater diversity. Trees of different sizes and ages provide different habitats, for example. We know about the importance of hollow-bearing trees, and it has been demonstrated that thinned plantings, where a smaller number of trees grow more rapidly due to reduced competition for light and nutrients, more quickly produce these essential old-growth characteristics. And we also know that larger trees are less susceptible to drought. So in a world with higher temperatures and more frequent drought, areas with diverse tree stocks, including larger trees, will survive; those with overstocked, denser, uniform plantations will not, with catastrophic consequences for the rest of the ecosystems which rely on them.

This is a small fraction of the science behind this basic truth, but I would also like to add a couple of interesting cultural considerations. The government's own *Biodiversity 2037* strategy notes that one way of increasing biodiversity is to get people involved in nature. That is actually quite a profound truth for a government report, and it is totally contradicted by locking up the forests. This government also claims to recognise the importance of Indigenous knowledge and cultural fire practices, yet given the decades of fuel supply built up in national parks—(*Time expired*)

Adjournment

Mr LEANE (Eastern Metropolitan—Minister for Local Government, Minister for Suburban Development, Minister for Veterans) (17:25): I move:

That the house do now adjourn.

MIDDLE ROAD, TRUGANINA

Mr FINN (Western Metropolitan) (17:25): (1868) I wish to raise a matter this evening on the adjournment for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. The minister will recall—well, he may not, but hopefully he will—that I raised the other day, it might have even been yesterday, that the Melton City Council has started a campaign: 'Fix Our Roads'. This particular road that I refer to today is a VicRoads road—it needs major fixing, let me assure you, and urgent fixing at that—and that is Middle Road in Truganina. I would like to thank Wendy Bitans from Truganina. She is a regular correspondent on a number of subjects. Wendy has been kind enough to point out to me something that I may have let slip from my memory, and that is the state of Middle Road in Truganina. This would have to be one of the worst roads in Victoria. It is just a shocker. It feeds on and off Hopkins Road, and I am told by Mrs Bitans this is a designated fire track. How the hell a fire truck could get down there I have no idea. It is absolutely shocking; it is shocking.

We really need the minister to take some pretty decisive action on this, particularly with the budget coming up. It would seem to me this should be a priority for an area that is growing so rapidly, an area that was once—yes, it was once—country. It now has huge numbers of cars and trucks and various other vehicles using the roads, and we need the appropriate attention from government to make sure that these roads are maintained—not just maintained but built up to the standard that they should be. Particularly Middle Road is extremely important. If anything happens on Hopkins Road, well, Middle

Road is it. That is the bottom line. If huge numbers of cars were to be diverted onto Middle Road, I fear to think what might happen. It would not be a pleasant thing.

I join Mrs Bitans and indeed many local people in the Truganina area in asking the minister, as a matter of urgency, to fix Middle Road, to bring it up to a reasonable standard, to bring it out of the century before last and to bring it up to a standard that we would find acceptable and reasonable in 2022.

MURRAY BASIN RAIL PROJECT

Mr GRIMLEY (Western Victoria) (17:28): (1869) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Transport Infrastructure in the other place, and the action that I am seeking is for the minister to speak to the Treasurer to advocate for regional rail investments, including the business case for the Murray Basin rail project's (MBRP) full standardisation. As part of the minister's response I would be very keen to find out what the outcomes were from when the minister and her federal counterpart, Barnaby Joyce, met in February about future rail investment.

Many stakeholders I have spoken to are at a loss to know what is stopping the Andrews Labor government from properly investing in the Murray Basin rail project, especially its full standardisation. The wants, needs and perceptions of my region stand in contrast to the recent media release by the government on Tuesday last week, which said that the Murray Basin rail project was 'on track' and 'ahead of schedule'. This is just simply not true. It is four years since it was promised to be completed—and counting. The government further stated:

Works will enable 49 train paths on the Murray Basin network, up from the current 28 paths, and it is estimated to remove around 20,000 truck trips off the road.

If the government is spruiking the benefits of this stage of the works, why has it not explored the potential benefits of completing the Murray Basin rail project?

To the issue of being behind schedule, a Victorian Auditor-General's report in 2020 found that the MBRP was three years behind schedule, with 87 per cent of funds exhausted and without a completion date in sight. The report stated that the MBRP has 'not met scope, time, cost or quality expectations'. This obviously is starkly opposite to the government's claims last week.

The Rail Freight Alliance, the Victorian Farmers Federation, plenty of councils in my electorate and others are devastated by the way the MBRP has been handled, but there is still time to get it right. I read with huge excitement that Portland to Maroona will receive \$2.2 million from the federal budget to investigate the cost of upgrading the Portland line to a 23-tonne axle load. Dan Tehan, the local MP for Wannon, said that:

The business case will determine the full extent of the level of upgrade needed including scope, benefits and beneficiaries, and it will be completed in eighteen weeks ...

It is great that the federal government have recognised the genuine potential benefits of the project, but wouldn't it be great for the state and federal governments to work collaboratively on regional rail in the future? What are we waiting for?

Derryn Hinch's Justice Party was not set up to lobby for regional rail. We are a party concerned with the legal system, victim-survivors and a public register for child sex offenders, but seeing the clear injustices in investment in metropolitan projects versus those of the poor cousin in the south-west of the state, I have no choice but to keep bringing this up. I know it has a long history of neglect and politics, but we need to take the politics out of the Murray Basin rail project and properly jointly fund it by the state and federal governments. So to reiterate, the action that I seek is for the minister to speak to the state Treasurer and advocate for the \$5 million for the business case for full standardisation of the MBRP.

ALCOHOL AND OTHER DRUG SERVICES

Ms LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (17:31): (1870) My adjournment matter is directed to the Minister for Mental Health and addresses the need for alcohol and drug rehabilitation centres to be established in Shepparton and Mildura, and the action that I seek is for the minister to ensure that there is funding in the 2022–23 state budget to establish residential drug and alcohol rehabilitation centres in Shepparton and Mildura to provide the vital services that Victorians suffering from addiction in these areas need.

Unless we are extremely lucky, every member in this place, indeed every corner of Victorian society, has been impacted by the scourge that is alcohol and drug addiction. Nearly every family in every Victorian community has been touched in some way by the evil of addiction and the devastation it causes. Eventually the life of an addict is one of utter chaos, with every minute of every day fixated on their next score, only finding short-lived peace when doing so. Addiction is a devastating illness that can be managed but never cured, and sufferers should never be derided; rather, they need love and support and most importantly professional help to aid their recovery.

The Andrews Labor government has failed to establish adequate rehabilitation facilities in country Victoria needed to address the epidemic that is ravaging country communities. Infrastructure Victoria recognised this fact in its *Victoria's Infrastructure Strategy 2021–2051* document, with recommendation 91 to the Victorian government being:

Within five years, build residential detoxification and rehabilitation facilities in regional Victoria to provide equitable access to alcohol and other drug treatment.

The strategy goes on to mention several regions in most need of rehabilitation facilities, including both the Goulburn region, encompassing Shepparton and the Goulburn Valley, and the Mallee region, which includes Mildura and the Sunraysia area.

Both Shepparton and Mildura are in urgent need of residential rehabilitation centres at each location, with patients having to travel long distances away from the support of family and friends to access these services at the moment. Private facilities are very expensive, and the cost of such treatment is out of the financial reach of patients and their families. The upcoming state budget is the perfect opportunity for the minister to commit funding to build residential rehabilitation centres in both Shepparton and Mildura and deliver the help local people suffering from addiction desperately need.

SCHOOL SPORTS FACILITIES

Dr CUMMING (Western Metropolitan) (17:34): (1871) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Education, and the action that I seek is for the minister to explain why children at government schools are not being provided with equal access to sporting facilities to further their sporting careers.

Some interesting figures were released last year. Of the two teams playing in the grand final, a surprising number came from private schools. Traditionally only a handful of players have come from private schools. They mainly came from the local area and from government schools. But last year the Bulldogs had 13 players from private schools, including Xavier College and Geelong Grammar, for example, and the Demons had 12 players from private schools, including Melbourne Grammar again, Carey and Haileybury. The trend is growing at a startling rate. Two years ago a survey of all AFL players showed that less than 30 per cent came from government schools. Over 70 per cent came from a Catholic or independent school. Your chances of playing AFL are almost four times higher if you went to an independent school and three times higher if you come from a Catholic school.

Why is this happening? One reason is the provision of scholarships to talented players by the private schools, and the other is a lack of sporting grounds at government schools—an increasing trend. The new Seddon campus of Footscray High School has very little outdoor space and is reliant on Victoria University facilities, which are all indoors. Students can do basketball, netball, tennis, badminton,

cardio, spin classes and more, but where are the outdoor sports like cricket, hockey and football for these schools? Similarly Richmond High School has no designated sporting ground—they have to share the park next door. I understand this because I had the same situation when I went to school in Braybrook. Do our children have to share the dog park? What can we provide for them? Sport is essential for students—for their health, for their wellbeing and for teaching them team building and leadership. In order for our children to play sport they need these facilities attached to their schools.

WASTE AND RECYCLING MANAGEMENT

Ms CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (17:36): (1872) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Health, and it is in relation to the clinical waste being generated at hospitals, vaccination hubs, clinics and other health outlets as a result of the COVID crisis and the generation of PPE and the like. Victoria is currently generating clinical waste rapidly and in large volumes. Major clinical waste disposal companies have raised concerns regarding the backlog of this waste, describing the sheer volume being dealt with as overwhelming and unmanageable. I have been contacted by several people, but in particular people working in the industry have said just how unmanageable it is becoming.

Multiple issues are attributed to this backlog, which is creating an increasing public health and safety risk in our communities. Firstly, as this waste must be incinerated the incinerator machines require extensive maintenance, which is not a current priority. Due to the lack of maintenance, clinical waste is then remaining in the disposal trucks at the depots, creating a backlog as many of the incinerators are not functioning. As a flow-on effect, this is leading to waste building up at the depots, and it is now spilling over at these depots, causing substantial health and safety risks, as I said, not only in the local vicinity but more broadly. The issue is getting more critical each day as waste from hospitals, vaccination sites and other clinical areas is not being appropriately managed and disposed of.

Action must be immediately taken to fix this disposal system, as it is just building up each and every day, putting the health of Victorians at risk and also creating this massive backlog of medical waste lingering in these depots. The Environment Protection Authority Victoria has been contacted and is involved in resolving the issue, I understand, but there are requests from those working in these industries, saying, ‘We need more immediate action’. So the action I am seeking is that the Minister for Health, not the Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change, provide to the house the exact details of the plan to fix this exacerbating clinical waste issue in Victoria.

WOMBAT STATE FOREST

Mr QUILTY (Northern Victoria) (17:39): (1873) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change. Wombat State Forest is a tinderbox. Storms last year knocked hundreds of thousands of trees to the ground in Wombat State Forest. Experts describe the resulting ground litter as a ticking firebomb. Fuel loads are sitting at 10 to 20 times higher than average. The entire area is at risk. Associate professor of fire ecology and management at Melbourne University Kevin Tolhurst warns that every effort should be put into reducing the fuel load lying on the forest floor by timber harvesting.

Geoff Proctor is a former owner of Black Forest Timber Mill. He explains that this timber needs to be harvested immediately because it is beginning to crack. Unfortunately his mill was shut down because of government hardwood policies made during the Bracks era. This Labor government has expanded those policies into a complete ban, and all of Victoria’s hardwood mills are set to be shut down in the near future. Black Forest Timber Mill is now a complex for a microbrewery, artisan studio, art gallery, providore centre and eco accommodation hub. It is also home to a solar hub where they hold camps to teach students about solar and wind power.

Local Indigenous group Dja Dja Wurrung chief executive Rodney Carter described the fuel load levels as ‘absolutely terrifying’. Dja Dja Wurrung have recently been granted the rights to timber in the Wombat State Forest and have approached VicForests to harvest the fallen trees, describing the

practice as traditional forest gardening. Carter says he is not doing it for profit, it is just good forest management. But the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning have threatened Dja Dja Wurrung with legal action if they begin the harvest. The harvest is already 18 months overdue, and the government is going to continue to stall until the wood is no longer valuable—and it is then going to have to clear the fuel load anyway. Instead the environment minister has announced that even more areas will be included as part of the forest, including downgrading huge areas of the state forest to national park that will be locked up and shut down. Meanwhile activist groups have managed to shut down Victorian timber mills because of frivolous lawsuits, stalling the supply of timber harvesting, and there is not enough wood for the mills to process.

So here is the summary: the government crippled the Victorian hardwood industry. They then pretended to hand Wombat State Forest to the traditional owners but are really forcing them to manage the land only as the government tells them. Now they are preventing a tinderbox of naturally felled trees being turned into useful timber, leaving them to deteriorate into fuel loads for the next fire. And their plan for the future is to destroy the state's entire hardwood-processing capacity, despite the fact that it is a sustainable and profitable industry that can help reduce fire danger. The action I seek from the minister is to facilitate the removal and harvest of fallen trees in Wombat State Forest before it is too late.

BAMSTONE

Mrs McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (17:41): (1874) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Resources and concerns the wonderful Victorian bluestone from Western Victoria Region produced by Bamstone.

Ms Shing interjected.

Mrs McARTHUR: Listen here, Harriet, you will learn a lot. Bamstone is a third-generation family business based in Port Fairy in my electorate, but its origins go back much further than that. Volcanic lava flowed down from Mount Rouse and across the valley to Port Fairy, creating a layer of Australian basalt bluestone of exceptional quality and strength. The potential was first probably noted by Don and Yvonne Bartlett in 1975. Michael and Cheryl Steel took over in 2001, and Sam Steel joined just last year. I know that they are proud to be a family business, a Victorian business and an Australian business. They have pride in their product and in the way they do business, and as a result the wider community has great pride in them. My constituents are always pleased to hear that Bamstone were significant suppliers to the annex here at Parliament House, for example, and you do not have to look far across the state to find scores of other projects their stone defines—even the streets we walk on, from Warrnambool city centre to Acland Street, St Kilda. Their range of products runs from domestic and residential to commercial business properties and even to state-significant civil engineering projects, and it is all based on a philosophy of respecting the natural product and not exploiting the earth.

I congratulate Bamstone on their most recent reward, the Silver Gilt Show Garden at the 2022 Melbourne International Flower and Garden Show awards. Working with designer Mark Browning, in honour of whose mother, Audrey, the garden was named Aud, Bamstone were deservedly recognised again for the quality of their product, their craft and their imagination.

The action I seek from the minister is that she join me in congratulating this exemplary Victorian business and committing again to supporting their efforts to grow and flourish as a business. They are a prime example that business can be about cooperation and that staff, owners, customers, the environment and the quality of Victorian public spaces can all be winners, and they show too that mining and the use of natural products more generally is not by definition damaging or exploitative. So, Minister, please join me in acknowledging this and congratulating Bamstone on their significant achievements.

The PRESIDENT: I do not want to waste much time, but I am thinking of the action that you require from the minister—to join you and congratulate them. I do not know if this is an action, but anyway, I will leave it with the minister in the end.

WORKER SCREENING ACT 2020

Ms PATTEN (Northern Metropolitan) (17:45): (1875) My adjournment matter is for Minister Stitt, and the action I am seeking relates to outright discriminatory provisions built into the Worker Screening Act 2020 related to NDIS worker screening. Under the Worker Screening Act the secretary must refuse to give NDIS clearance on an NDIS category B application unless exceptional circumstances exist. Distressingly, listed as category B offences in schedule 3 of the act, at section 6(k) and (l), are the repealed offences of buggery and attempted buggery. Until 1981 in Victoria gay men were convicted and even imprisoned for the offence of buggery. Sex between consenting adults should never have been criminalised, which is what these laws did. In some cases individuals who would today be treated as victims of sexual abuse were charged with criminal offences such as buggery. In 2014 the Victorian government legislated to erase the criminal records of homosexual men who were convicted for having consensual sex in the past when it was illegal. The Victorian government made a formal state apology to people convicted under unjust laws against homosexual acts on 23 May 2016, so this is something I thought this government had well and truly corrected. But it appears not in respect of the Worker Screening Act, a supposedly modern piece of legislation, introduced in 2020. It still has the offences of buggery in it. So the action I seek is that the minister move immediately to remedy this aspect of law that discriminates against gay Victorians.

BAMSTONE

The PRESIDENT: Mrs McArthur, can you please reword the action.

Mrs McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (17:47): (1874) President, thank you very much. The action I seek is for the minister to join me in visiting Bamstone to congratulate them on their significant award.

DALTON AND EPPING ROADS, EPPING

Mr ONDARCHIE (Northern Metropolitan) (17:47): (1876) My adjournment matter this afternoon is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. I have tried this before with the Minister for Transport Infrastructure, but like a good AFLW player she handballed it straight to the minister for roads and did not want to go near it. The residents do not like the raised intersectional speed humps on Dalton Road and Epping Road, and as I indicated I have asked the minister for infrastructure about this before, but she said, ‘Not for me; give it to the minister for roads’, so maybe she was embarrassed because she built those things in the first place, those speed humps.

Mrs McArthur: She needs to do a survey.

Mr ONDARCHIE: She should do a survey of that local area, because I have, and I have to tell you I remember witnessing a large volume of crushed rock that had come out near one of the Dalton Road intersections. It had probably come off a truck as that truck went about its business and hit those speed humps. I also witnessed at the time a truck with scaffolding hit the speed humps and the load on the truck jumped all over the place. I was very lucky it did not come off the truck, and I thank God it did not come off and hit a car that was travelling behind it.

The minister in response to a similar question regarding raised intersectional speed humps in this place said, ‘As always, these decisions are made on the very best safety advice from our expert teams’. But she has never given me that safety advice. I wonder if it really exists. So, minister for roads, the action I seek from you today is for the government to respect the wishes of the community and in the upcoming budget get rid of those raised intersectional speed humps on Epping and Dalton roads and investigate other safety measures that could save lives.

WESTERN METROPOLITAN REGION MATERNITY SERVICES

Ms VAGHELA (Western Metropolitan) (17:48): (1877) My adjournment matter is directed to the Honourable Martin Foley MP, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services and Minister for Equality in the other place. This adjournment matter relates to the portfolio responsibilities of health. Being able to give birth is one of the most rewarding yet difficult things an expectant mother goes through; however, the situation is dire for many expectant mothers in the city's western suburbs. I understand that, as the Wyndham City Council says, there is a growing healthcare crisis unfolding in Wyndham where in some cases women are being forced to give birth in cars on the side of the road due to a shortage of maternity beds at the hospital. According to a recent media report, there are not enough maternity beds for expectant mothers in the fastest growing municipality in the country to care for pregnant women.

Such experiences demonstrate the difficult challenges residents of the Western Metropolitan Region are facing. The growth in Wyndham is unprecedented. The younger generation dominates the Wyndham population, with almost 60 per cent being 35 years old or younger. Many new migrants are also choosing Wyndham as their home and the place where they want to build their families. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics in 2020 Wyndham's registered births were 4850. This was the highest in the west and second highest in all Victorian local government areas, so it is very clear that there is a requirement for investment.

There is a need for another hospital in Wyndham city, because the current healthcare infrastructure is not sufficient for the population. Whilst the proposed hospital in Melton, the construction of the new Footscray Hospital and the expansion of the Sunshine Hospital will provide some relief, it will not be enough to meet the growing needs of Wyndham residents. Another hospital needs to be fast-tracked for Wyndham city residents. The action I seek from the minister is to provide me with an update on when the government will commit to building another hospital in the Western Metropolitan Region.

LATROBE VALLEY AIR MONITORING

Ms BATH (Eastern Victoria) (17:50): (1878) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change, the Honourable Lily D'Ambrosio in the other place, and the action I seek from the minister is for her to fund a real-time air-monitoring system using the best available technology, such as an XRF machine or better—an XRF is an X-ray fluorescence lead-monitoring machine—and also to facilitate community engagement to assist in how this data will be monitored, read and interpreted for the community.

Members of the Latrobe Valley advocacy group ALiVe Gippsland and other concerned Hazelwood North residents are concerned about whether the Andrews government-endorsed, Chinese-owned Chunxing used lead-acid battery recycling facility being planned for and constructed in Fourth Road, Morwell, will meet the highest standards to meet their approval for their health and wellbeing. They are primarily concerned about the ULAB's close proximity to the Hazelwood North school that is less than 2 kilometres from door to door and also local homes and farms.

While the Latrobe Valley has an air monitoring system called the Latrobe Valley Information Network that monitors particulate matter PM1, PM2.5, PM10, carbon dioxide, wind temperature and humidity, it is not designed to monitor lead emissions, which poses a great concern, noting the plant is licensed to emit up to 54 kilograms annually as a by-product of fugitive emissions from the process of lead recycling. I note that this should be expanded to include the Hazelwood North area because at the moment there is not an LVIN air monitoring system in that Hazelwood North area. As they have made representations to me over time, I endorse ALiVe's call for this lead monitoring system—as I have called it, an X-ray fluorescence machine. They are used primarily where lead smelters occur, and they are in other parts of our country, other states, but require a secondary particulate filter to validate the data.

ADJOURNMENT

Wednesday, 6 April 2022

Legislative Council

1255

Understanding that real-time scientific readings will avail families of some transparency and oversight so that they can make decisions around their daily activities depending on the readings and the weather conditions, ALiVe also argues that the health innovation zone needs to be embedded in a more rigorous manner. The government's own website goes to the health innovation. It gives a voice to community aspirations and the planning and delivery of better health outcomes and wellbeing outcomes and where the process of co-design with individuals and organisations is actively encouraged. It is also off the back of the Hazelwood mine fire inquiry. That is all well and good, but they want to see outcomes, and they would like this lead monitoring system to be put in place and the minister to fund it.

RESPONSES

Mr LEANE (Eastern Metropolitan—Minister for Local Government, Minister for Suburban Development, Minister for Veterans) (17:54): There were 10 adjournment matters directed to, if my count is right, eight different ministers. I apologise if my count is wrong. Just briefly on Mrs McArthur's adjournment, I thank her for changing the action, but if it came to congratulating that particular company, I am personally happy to do that right now and congratulate that company.

The PRESIDENT: The house stands adjourned.

House adjourned 5.54 pm.

Joint sitting of Parliament**SENATE VACANCY****VICTORIAN RESPONSIBLE GAMBLING FOUNDATION**

Members of both houses met in Assembly chamber at 6.03 pm.

The CHAIR (Hon. N Elasmár): Before we proceed, I remind everyone, including visitors in the gallery, that you may not take photos. I invite proposals from members for the appointment of a person to hold the vacant place in the Senate. I call the Premier.

Mr ANDREWS (Mulgrave—Premier): I propose:

That Ms Jana Stewart hold the place in the Senate rendered vacant by the death of Senator Kimberley Kitching.

She is willing to accept the nomination. In order to satisfy the joint sitting as to the requirements of section 15 of the commonwealth constitution, I also advise that I am in possession of advice from the state secretary of the Victorian branch of the Australian Labor Party that Ms Jana Stewart is the selection of the Australian Labor Party, the party previously represented in the Senate by Senator Kimberley Kitching.

The CHAIR: Who seconds the proposal?

Mr GUY (Bulleen—Leader of the Opposition): I second the proposal.

The CHAIR: Are there any further proposals? As only one person has been proposed, I declare that Ms Jana Stewart has been chosen to hold the place in the Senate rendered vacant by the death of Senator Kimberley Kitching.

We now move to the election of a member of Parliament to the board of the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation. I now invite proposals from members with regard to the member of Parliament to be elected to the board of the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation. I call the Premier.

Mr ANDREWS (Mulgrave—Premier): I propose:

That Mr David Morris be elected to the board of the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation.

He is willing to accept the nomination.

The CHAIR: Who seconds the proposal?

Mr GUY (Bulleen—Leader of the Opposition): I second the proposal.

The CHAIR: Are there any further proposals? As there is only one member proposed, I declare that Mr David Morris is elected to the board of the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation.

I now declare the joint sitting closed.

Proceedings terminated 6.05 pm.